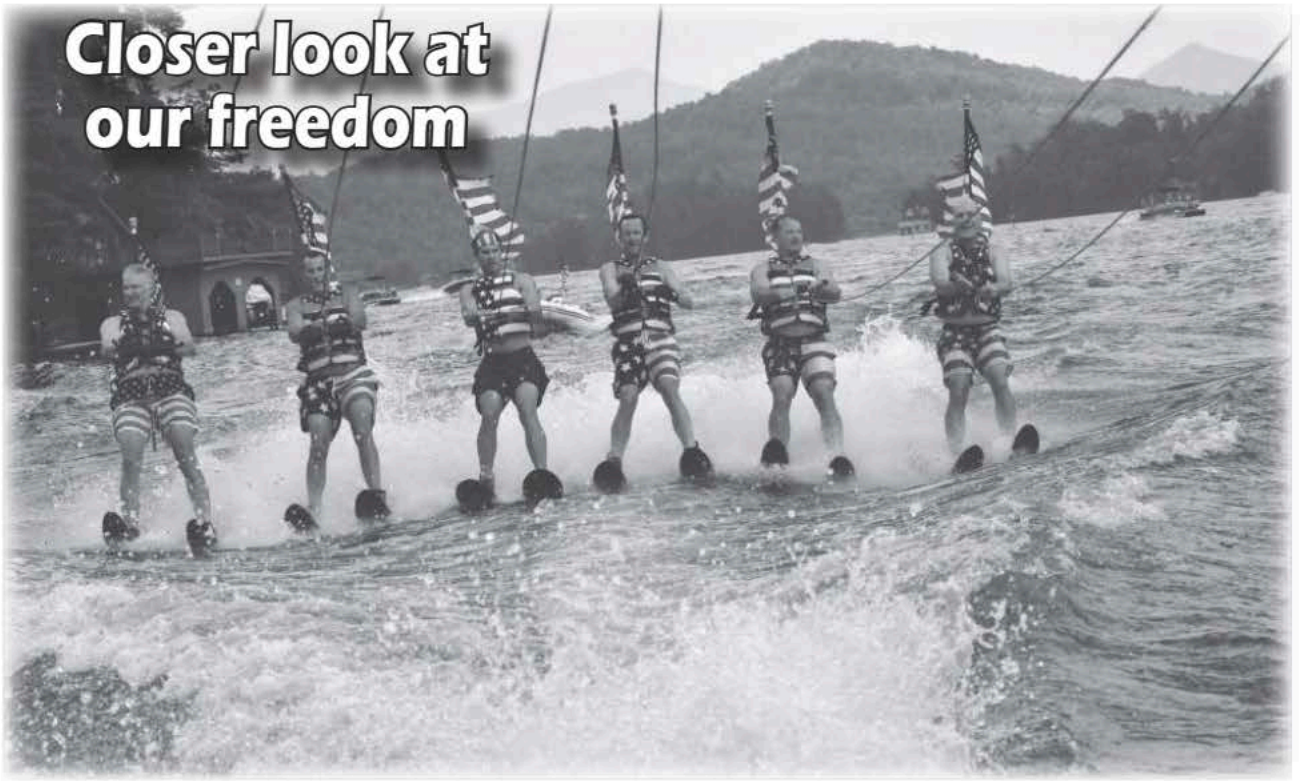


Enoch Autry/The Clayton Tribune

Like the July 2, 2023, annual event, Lake Burton has served 14 years as the site of the Ski Patriots' annual Salute to America.

Seeing the Ski Patriots Salute to America for my first time

I observed the Ski Patriots Salute to America event for the first time this year. The Ski Patriots performed their 15th annual ski show on Sunday, July 2, 2023.

When I arrived early Sunday morning, the preparations had already begun. Boats arrived at the dock adorned with American flags. Skiers dressed in patriotic swimsuits readied their equipment. The team gathered on the dock to discuss the game plan. Then, everyone boarded the boats and headed out for the show.

The first set of Ski Patriots jumped into the water with American flags stuck in the backs of their lifejackets and positioned themselves for take-off. Eight skiers were pulled by a red, white, and blue ski boat. The boat took off, and the Ski Patriots put on a show. They waved and saluted as they skied across the lake. Spectators enjoyed the show from boats, boat houses, and porches as the Ski Patriots passed by. Pickup boats accompanied the team from behind to collect any fallen skiers.



Cassidy Gruber
Guest Columnist

The treacherous waters of the busy lake were no match for the Ski Patriots. With impressive strength and skill, the skiers paraded across choppy waters as their supporters cheered them on. Each skier's hard work and dedication to this event truly show with each performance.

The Ski Patriots perform ten sets of skiing, lasting about eight minutes each. A new squad of eight skiers replaces the previous team to give the skiers a break between each set. This year, the first set consisted of all girls, the second set consisted of all boys, and the final set consisted of all dads.

The show concluded when the final set of skiers returned to the dock where it all start-

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ed. Team members assembled on the dock to celebrate their successful performance.

The Ski Patriots were established in 2009 when the Penland family thought it would be fun to stick American flags in their lifejackets and put on a ski show for the Fourth of July weekend. A team of five skiers included Lee Penland, his daughters Lauren and Leah, and their boyfriends, Chandler and Alex.

Spectators enjoyed the show so much that it became an annual event, and the team became known as the Ski Patriots. Chandler Van De Water and Leah Penland have participated in all 14 events and are the longest-running Ski Patriots. The Ski Patriots are now a team of 40 skiers consisting of females and males, new and experienced.

LBCA board member Lee Penland has headed this event for all 14 years.

"I am always not surprised but pleased with how much this event means to the whole community. We have so many folks that work it and so many new folks that make it extra special," said Lee Penland, LBCA board member. "We love that kids are getting involved and enjoying the thrill of the show. We hope to keep having more skiers and younger skiers join the Ski Patriots."

Ten-year-old Molly Brackett is one of the youngest members of the Ski Patriots. Brackett skied in the event for the first time this year.

"My first year as a Ski Patriot was really good," said Brackett. "It was really fun to ski with my dad and sister beside me."

Stephanie Yates, an LBCA member, has been a Ski Patriot for three years.

"I joined the Ski Patriots because I loved watching the ski show so much that I wanted to be a part of it, said Yates. "I have really enjoyed my time as a Ski Patriot; it has been a great way to meet new people on the lake!"

Rebecca O'Connor, an LBCA member, participated in the Ski Patriots Salute to America for the first time this year.

"It has been a total blast skiing with the Ski Patriots!" said O'Connor. "I have met so many enjoyable people on the lake. I especially love the multi-generational aspect of the group."

Over the years, the Ski Patriots Salute to America has become a treasured Lake Burton tradition. The event is cherished for how it brings the community together in celebration of our nation's independence and will continue to do so for many years.

About the Lake Burton Civic Association

The Lake Burton Civic Association is for people who love Lake Burton and the surrounding area. We are here to promote and maintain the integrity and interests of the lake and those who live here. Learn more at lbca.net.

Photos of the 2023 Ski Patriots Salute to America:
https://members.lbca.net/photo_album/gallery_view.php?org_id=LBCA&pv_id=6164669

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