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THIS IS MY FAVORITE FLOWER!



Buoyant spirits



More than 300 boats anchored in Petite Lake to take part in Rodney McManamy's Swing Crew Party in 2005.

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Swing Crew Party still going strong

BY LEE FILAS

Daily Herald Staff Writer

Rodney McManamy says he was a stupid 22-year-old living in Wisconsin when he decided to put his favorite local band on his houseboat and have them play until 4 a.m.

But people who attend the Swing Crew Party on the Chain O' Lakes refuse to call him stupid. Instead, they look at him as a visionary.

Rodney's Swing Crew Party on Petite Lake in Antioch will return again Saturday, further cementing the allegedly "stupid" move in 1992 as the epic party of the summer for every single boater on the Chain.

I made a mistake "years ago when I was young and stupid," McManamy said. "Now, I just do it because I'm stupid, I guess."

The party features hundreds of boats tied together and anchored on the largest sandbar on Petite Lake, while music from the now-infamous Swing Crew Band rocks throughout the afternoon.

McManamy said the simplest way to understand the allure of the annual party is to think Chain O' Lakes meets spring break meets Mardi Gras.

He said he never intended for it to get as big as it has, but he also understands why boaters throughout the Chain look forward to the event every year.

"I do it because everyone really seems to have a great time," he said. "I do it for my friends and as a way to get everyone back together."

McManamy said the whole party concept started in 1992, when he and those friends put a pontoon boat on Lake Redstone in LaValle, Wis.

He said the band played unplugged during that first year, hopping from boat to boat to help people hear.

He said the party grew every year, even prompting people to swim from shore to the center of the lake to join in on the fun.

But, after "joining the real world" after college, he moved to the Chain O' Lakes and, following the purchase of an 18-foot ski-boat, decided to purchase a houseboat and started the party again.

"We liked the boat when we bought it and wanted to fix it up," he said. "But, it was



An aerial shot shows more than 200 boats anchored and docked at McManamy's Swing Crew Party in 2004. The party returns to Petite Lake Saturday.

hopeless, so we painted it pink and nicknamed it the Pink Flamingo."

The houseboat played host to the first party on the Chain on July 12, 1997, where more than 75 boats anchored and rocked the day away.

In the decade since, people have turned the small party into a cult hit.

Now, more than 500 boats are expected to park on the waist-deep sandbar in the middle of Petite Lake and watch the Swing Crew perform, McManamy said.

"Truthfully, it all depends on the weather and how many people hear about it," he said. "It was small the first few years but has really taken off in the four years."

He said the word-of-mouth that has brought him popularity has also caused some problems.

He said due to the amount of people and boats parked in one spot, extra precautions are being taken this year to ensure safety.

First, the Fox Waterway Agency and the Lake County Sheriff's Marine Unit have ordered a temporary no-anchor lane through the center of the party to ensure rescue boats can get through.

Secondly, marine unit patrols will be at the party to try and maintain order and

stop any laws from being broken.

Lt. Bruce Scottberg, head of the marine unit, said the police department will work in conjunction with the fire department and Fox Waterway Agency to ensure the annual bash is safe and no criminal activity will be present.

"The Chain O' Lakes belongs to everyone, including families, and any indecent behavior will not be tolerated," he said. "So, its safe to assume that if people are going to be stupid, they will be arrested."

However, he added if people maintain the law and just enjoy themselves, there will not be any problems.

"We want everyone to have fun and have a great time," he said. "But, common sense and courtesy needs to be used at all times."

McManamy said he has worked well with the police, because, more than anything else, he doesn't want problems during the party itself.

"Everyone helps out to make sure stupid things like fights and what not doesn't break out," he said. "I'll continue to do it as long as it doesn't get out of hand."

"As far as I'm concerned, if everyone is smart, the party will continue," he said.