

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Safe Kids Provides Free Lifejacket Loaner Stations at Van Pugh and Old Federal Parks

Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County participates in launch of national program to reduce drownings and educate kids about water safety

[Gainesville, GA] – This week, Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County participated in the launch of Kids Don't Float, a water safety program of Safe Kids USA that is designed to decrease drownings – the second leading cause of injury-related death to kids ages 1-14 – by providing loaner lifejackets at Van Pugh and Old Federal parks on Lake Lanier, and educating kids on open water safety.

“Because drowning is so prevalent in the United States, we were delighted to host a launch of the national Kids Don't Float program,” says Kim Martin, coalition coordinator for Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County.

As part of the program, Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County has set up two lifejacket loaner stations at Lake Lanier, one at Van Pugh North Park on Gaines Ferry Road and one at Old Federal Park on Jim Crow Road. Each station holds eight loaner lifejackets, ranging in size from small child to adult. The lifejackets are available for use at no charge, to be returned to the unmanned stations at the end of the day. Each station also provides education tips from “PFD Otter” on the importance of wearing lifejackets as well as instructions on how to properly fit a lifejacket.

“As children grow older, the drowning risk increases for them in open water settings, in part because they are less apt to wear a lifejacket,” says Martin. “Through the support and resources of Safe Kids USA, Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County hopes that by providing loaner lifejackets and educating our children and caregivers, we can reduce drowning fatalities and increase child safety in open water settings.”

Kids Don't Float was developed in Homer, Alaska, to combat the high rate of drownings in Alaska. The program was then expanded by the Coast Guard Auxiliary, the State of Alaska, Alaska Safe Kids and representatives from different community organizations to be used throughout Alaska.

Thanks to the success of Kids Don't Float, Safe Kids USA has expanded the program to include 38 lifejacket loaner stations at 19 locations nationwide. The locations include stations in Savannah, Ga.; Marietta, Ga.; Gainesville, Ga.; Holland, Mich.; Richland, Wash.; Kelso, Wash.; Yakima, Wash.; Silverdale, Wash.; Tacoma, Wash.; Houston, Texas; Austin, Texas; Lebanon, N.H.; Portland, Ore; Oklahoma City, Okla.; Tulsa, Okla.; Manitowoc, Wis.; Lakewood, Colo.; Topeka, Kansas; and Robbinsdale, Minn.

“We want to educate kids on open water safety and how important it is to always wear a lifejacket in and around open water,” says Martin. “We want to make this educational learning experience fun for them so the safety messages stay with them for life. Properly wearing a lifejacket in and around open water is an important safety precaution that can help reduce drownings and save kids' lives.”

For more information about the lifejacket loaner stations or water safety, call Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County at 770-533-8095.

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Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County is funded by The Medical Center Foundation's Healthy Journey campaigns. For more information, please contact Kim Martin at 770-533-8095 or visit www.safekidsgainesvillehall.org.

PHOTO CUTLINES:

Loaner Station: Safe Kids' Lifejacket Loaner Stations at Van Pugh and Old Federal parks provide free loaner lifejackets and water safety education.

Installation: Members of Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County install a loaner lifejacket station Thursday at Old Federal park.

Installation Group: Safe Kids members participating in the station installation include (l to r) Sgt. Jeff Elrod of the Gainesville Police Department; Kim Martin, Safe Kids coordinator; Park Ranger Nic Evans of the Army Corps of Engineers; Ofc. Melissa Begley of the Gainesville Police Department; Ofc. Kevin Holbrook of the Gainesville Police Department; and not pictured, Linda Adams, Hall County School System.