



## THE POST

Kentucky Post

Back Issues

Cincinnati.com

AP News

News

Business

Living

Opinion

Sports

Search

Contact Us

## SCRIPPS LINKS

Do It Yourself

Fine Living

Food Network

Home &amp; Garden

## DAILY FIX

Weather

Traffic

Talk, Cincinnati

Giveaways

Horoscopes

Lottery Numbers

Comics

Crosswords

Stahler

## SPORTS

Bengals

UK Wildcats

Reds

Golf Guide

NKU sports

## ENTERTAINMENT

Movies

Dining

Menus

Local Events

Video Games

## CLASSIFIEDS

Jobs

Cars

Homes

General

## LOCAL INFO

Maps / Directions

Send an E-Postcard

Visitor's Guide

Local Links

School Links

## Their beat is the river

By David Wecker, Post staff reporter

The old party boat sat crosswise in the main channel of the Ohio River, listing to one side. It didn't look at all river-worthy, but its crew was having too good a time to care.

As he approached it, Lt. Larry Perkins was thinking about what might happen if the boat's engine wouldn't start and a towboat pushing a string of barges were to come along. He was thinking, too, that the listing might be due to a leaky pontoon.

"Everything OK here?" Perkins called out, cutting his three Evinrude V8s as he idled up alongside.

The revelers recognized the red-white-and-blue V-hull boat with its Boone County Water Rescue insignia. They waved and grinned. A few proffered slices of watermelon.

It's another Friday night on the river. Perkins, 52, and his volunteer crew — Ken Purcell, a 38-year-old computer programmer and EMTs Emily Hoff, 23, and Scott Brown, 22 — are patrolling the 60 miles of shoreline that the Boone Water Rescue team covers, from below Big Bone to Locust Pike on the Licking River.

For 35 years, the water rescue team has been helping people in distress on the river. Usually, it's a simple matter of towing a ski boat to a marina so it can refuel.

But the team can do much more. The larger of its two boats is essentially a floating ambulance, for example, complete with a defibrillator.

The original purpose of the Boone County Water Rescue unit — the reason its founder, Dale Appel, established it — had more to do with recovery than rescue.

Appel, now 53, was a few years out of Boone County High School at the time. He'd taken up diving with the county's Civil Defense group because it struck him as adventurous. The Civil Defense group disbanded, but Appel and a half-dozen diving pals stayed in touch.

Appel remembers it was a hot summer day when he learned his best friend and his friend's father-in-law had drowned in the river, off the southern end of Boone County.

The practice with drownings in those days, Appel said, was to let nature take its course: A person drowns, the body sinks; a few days pass, the body resurfaces.

Appel was at the scene three days later when his friend's body was pulled

## Post Features



Store at the Post



Subscribe Online



HGTV



Personal Finance



Lottery Numbers

## Contact Us

[Editor of  
The Cincinnati P](#)

[Editor of  
The Kentucky P](#)

[Webmaster](#)

[Sports Editor](#)

[Living Editor](#)

[Business Edito](#)

[Kentucky Post  
City Editor](#)

## LATEST NATIONAL INTERNATIONAL N

- [California Girl Is Safe](#)
- [Bush: 'Times Are of Tough'](#)
- [Flood Deaths Rise Europe, Asia](#)
- [Dow Ends Down 2 Nasdaq Drops 38](#)
- [IBM Is Cutting 15, Workers](#)
- [Amtrak Halts High Speed Service](#)
- [Law: I Didn't Check Abuse Complaint](#)
- [Diamondbacks To Reds 6-1](#)

[HELP](#)  
[Feedback](#)  
[Subscribe](#)  
[Search](#)  
[Survey](#)

out of the river.

"It was one of those moments when you look into yourself and ask, 'What can I do to change the way this is done?'" he said.

"No one knew what to do to make things happen more quickly, to recover the body as soon as possible, to soften the hurt for the family."

Appel put out the word to police departments throughout Boone and Kenton counties: "You get a drowning, call me."

The first call, from Boone County police, came in summer 1972. A boy had drowned in Gunpowder Creek. Appel called one of his diving scuba pals, Jim Katzer, and told him to meet him there.

"We didn't know anything about getting a body out of water — we just knew we wanted to do something to help," Appel recalled.

"So we tied our wrists together with four feet of rope and went in. Jim touched the boy first. He'd been under less than six hours."

Before long, police agencies were tapping the team to retrieve evidence that had been pitched into streams, lakes or ponds. In one of those early details, Appel and his divers spent two weeks recovering a shotgun from the lake at World of Sports at Ky. 18 and Interstate 75. The shotgun had been broken down into three pieces and tossed into the lake at three different spots. The evidence was used to convict a Covington man of murdering his wife.

Today, Appel's team has a \$146,000 annual budget — the bulk of it from Boone County, with Kenton County and the City of Covington each giving \$15,000. The team includes some 50 volunteers. In 2001, they collectively recovered five drowning victims. The year before that, they retrieved eight.

The team goes where it's needed, Appel said. It was in Falmouth during the '97 flood, pulling people from second-story windows. Two years ago, the team recovered two drowning victims from a lake in Jessamine County.

In a highly publicized case in 1997, a cigarette boat called the Hard Times III crashed at 80 miles an hour into the shore on the Cincinnati side, near the Montgomery Inn at the Boathouse. The water rescue team was called to retrieve the bodies of the driver and two passengers killed in the impact.

The rescue team doesn't have police powers, but does work with other authorities, such as the Hamilton County Sheriff's office or Kentucky Water Patrol.

Each time they descend into the river, the team's divers face a different set of circumstances. Visibility is zero, so they have to go by what they can feel with their hands. At the same time, the environment is filled with hazards — fish hooks, tangled rebar, jagged pieces of steel torn from barges, bedsprings, car doors and, occasionally, raw sewage. "We've had divers come up with dynamite caps twisted up in their gear," Appel said.

"I'll never forget one evidence recovery detail at the Falmouth Quarry — we were looking for a stolen car. One of our divers got into a nest of snakes."

Over the years, Appel said, the Boone County Water Rescue team has learned — about current, about rising water, about what's down there that

can pose one kind of danger or another.

"Every lesson teaches us something about lowering the risk factor," he said.  
"From an outfit that started out with two guys and a piece of rope, I think we've come a long way."

Publication Date: 08-12-2002



[Email this story to a friend](#)

[NEWS](#)   [OPINION](#)   [BUSINESS](#)   [LIVING](#)   [SPORTS](#)   [ENTERTAINMENT](#)   [CLASSIFIED](#)   [PO](#)



[TALK](#)   [TRAFFIC](#)   [WEATHER](#)   [HOMES](#)   [CARS](#)   [JOBS](#)   [BENGALS](#)   [REDS](#)   [POST](#)   [CINCINNATI](#)

[Need help?](#) | [Suggestions](#) | [News tips](#) | [Letters to editors](#)  
[Web advertising](#) | [Place a classified](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Circulation](#)

[Copyright](#) 2001 [The Cincinnati Post](#), an [E.W. Scripps](#) newspaper.  
Use of this site signifies agreement to [terms of service](#) updated 2/28/98.

