

Craft stick houseboat represents joy, impact of working together

By Julie Walters

WMU Corporate Communications Manager

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – The joy of working together for the glory of God was on display as a houseboat constructed of nearly 700,000 craft sticks floated on Lay Lake near Birmingham, Ala., on November 7.

The boat launch was the culmination of a year-long effort as WMU engaged Southern Baptist churches in making craft stick units as a way to learn about the Cooperative Program (CP), a plan through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and Southern Baptist missions and ministries.

“As we prepare to celebrate 100 years of Southern Baptists working together through the Cooperative Program, these craft stick units pieced together to create this houseboat is a representation of the value of each of us doing our part and to ‘see’ how much more we can accomplish when we all work together,” said Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU.

Wisdom - Martin explained the focus



s Linda Smith of Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving, Texas
oncreates an interlocking panel with craft stick units sent by
C Pam Gibbs of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Tennessee. (Photo
wa credit: National WMU)

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For months, WMU received craft stick units from churches across the United States, from Alaska and Hawaii to Florida and everywhere in between. A total of 34,199 units were received and some packages included notes.

For example, Carrie Rickman of Retamah Park Baptist Church in Kingsville, Texas, wrote, "My son Sammy enjoyed the craft stick projects and watching the Monday Facebook updates so much that he wanted to do more at home. As they were gluing sticks, Sammy told his friend Allison about Jesus and why we need to work together to support missionaries. This was such a

fun idea. Thank you for encouraging our children to work together to share the Gospel of Christ Jesus.”

Sherrie Smith of Memorial Baptist Church in Newport, Tennessee, wrote, “Our small community has been dealing with major flooding issues from Hurricane Helene. Numerous families lost everything they owned. Our county lost water services and schools were closed for the entire week. And yet, 12 kids showed up at church to learn about helping others. God is so good.”

While children’s groups led the way, all ages have contributed.

Anniece Gates of First Church, Sherwood, Arkansas, wrote, “My 90-year-old mother made these and she appreciates the lesson you are teaching children.”

The Friesen’s daughter, Annie Keehn in Shawnee, Okla., shared, “God accomplishes amazing things through all of us working together. Colt and his Sunday School class enjoyed decorating these craft stick panels.” Colt is the Friesen’s 3-year-old grandson.

Constructing a Vision

In days preceding the boat launch, a team of 10 volunteers traveled from Texas and Illinois to join national WMU staff in Alabama to construct the houseboat upon a borrowed pontoon platform.

Volunteer Linda Smith of Plymouth Park Church, Irving, Texas, explained their church used the activity as part of their ongoing outreach to an area middle school.

“The kids from Crockett Middle School come to our church on Wednesday nights for Crockett Connection,” Smith explained. “They made a number of the craft stick units and this project involved all ages in our church.”



Heather Keller, children's ministry consultant, national, WMU, and Sarah Murray, children's design editor, national WMU – joined by a life-size image of Lottie Moon – thank churches for sending their craft stick units and share the successful houseboat launch via Facebook. The cross on the back wall of the houseboat was removed and transported to the national WMU office. (Photo credit: National WMU)

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In three days, the volunteers designed and built the frame and pieced together the craft stick units to make panels measuring 13.5” high by 26” wide with an extra 4” piece on either side to interlock panels side-by-side. In addition to the entire house structure, creativity flowed as volunteers used the craft stick units to create additional décor items and a picket fence.

During the construction, Heather Keller, children's ministry consultant for national WMU, shared the progress with the Friesen's. With a smile, Don mused, "Maria told me 38 years ago she wanted a home with a picket fence and you gave her one on your houseboat."

While no one will live in the craft stick houseboat, it was gifted to the gracious business owner who provided space in his shop for the construction. Pieces of the houseboat, such as the cross on the back wall and some representative craft stick units, were removed and transported to the national WMU office.

Reflections on the Build

"WMU seeks to assist churches in engaging all ages in missions by learning about missions, praying for missions, supporting missions, doing missions and telling other about Jesus," said Wisdom-Martin. "In essence, this one activity included all of these missional characteristics as those involved demonstrated how when we each do our part – when God's people work together for His glory – much more can be accomplished for the kingdom. And He provides and blesses in ways we can't even think or imagine."