

## **Let the Little Ones Lead** **By Judy Ruch**

While riding with my daughter and grandsons one day, I was surprised when the five year old shouted at his mom to **STOP THE CAR! MY SEATBELT ISN'T ON YET!** When I turned to look at him, his face showed he was really concerned that the car was moving down the drive-way while he was unbuckled in his seat.

How well little children learn these safety lessons! They are wonderful advocates for us adults who are sometimes in such a hurry that we forget to follow our own safety rules.

So, it occurred to me that those of us working hard to keep our lakes free from invasive species have an untapped resource. I could just hear little Noah saying, **“Stop! The boat has weeds on it. You have to clean it off before we leave.”** He is also a fervent angler. What a perfect time to teach him about how to use and dispose of bait. (It is also a good time to talk about using non-lead tackle to help our loons too.)

Voila! My training as a teacher kicked in and I devised a simple lesson perfect for summer library story hours, for use in day care situations or as a special children's program for your lake association. The program is geared for one hour. The activities are varied – active ones alternate with more passive ones so that it is appropriate for preschoolers through elementary years. The activities include art, music, literature, and a hands-on session of finding weeds and standing water in a real boat. We actually produce a book to become part of the permanent collection of the library or center. The main objective is to empower the children with knowledge to help remind adults to clean watercraft before and after putting them into a body of water. Children go home with a bag of information for their family and a visor that they decorated.

The program in its entirety - which includes printing and binding of the book - costs about \$2 per child. In my case, I am a member of our Presque Isle Town Lakes Committee here in Vilas County, Wisconsin. We have secured grants for education of our community to the danger of invasive species. I am able to get funding for the materials we use. If you are not in the same situation, perhaps your lake association, town board, or groups such as the Lion's Club could help sponsor such a program.

As a mother, grandmother, teacher, and fortunate person to have a home on a lovely lake, I believe anything we can do to preserve these pristine resources should be done. So I encourage anyone with a heart for children and a love for nature to educate the little ones in their life or in their area so that our lakes will be beautiful for future generations.