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# Golden opportunity



Eric Engman/News-Miner

The 1992 Olympic gold medal in kayaking.



Eric Engman/News-Miner

Joe Jacobi turns his kayak through a gate during a paddling instruction seminar featuring the 1992 Olympic gold medalist at the Midnight Sun Festival.



Chris Kapps photo

Olympic gold medal winner Joe Jacobi helps Steve Paskvan hold his paddle properly during the Tangle Lakes Gold Medal Workshop.

## Olympians teach at Denali, Tangle Lakes, make a splash at festival

By KRIS CAPPS  
For the News-Miner

As hundreds of people watched from shore, Olympic gold medal paddler Joe Jacobi demonstrated what an elite athlete can do, even on flat water of the Chena River in downtown Fairbanks.

Former Team USA coach Bob Campbell relentlessly ran Joe through his Olympic paddling paces. Joe expertly maneuvered around and through two slalom gates hanging over the river.

"What we really want is to see Joe go fast," Bob said, egging on the crowd. "Who wants to see



Chris Kapps photo

Bob Campbell and Joe Jacobi work with a group of kids at Denali Outdoor Center's Otto Lake Headquarters, near Denali.

Joe go fast?"

Raucous cheers left no doubt what would happen next.

With the clock ticking

— on Bob's wristwatch — Joe exploded into a sprint, leaving a wake behind him as he raced from gate to gate, the seconds



Chris Kapps photo

Former Team USA Coach Bob Campbell works with Jeff Fryberger of Fairbanks at the Tangle Lakes Workshop.

quickly ticking away. The crowd went wild, cheering and yelling for him to paddle faster and to slip through the slalom gate

without touching it.

That exciting demonstration, presented several times during the Midnight Sun Festival, was all in fun. But there is no doubt that the visit by the two Olympians marked a special event for the city of Fairbanks.

"It was fantastic," said Emma Wilson, executive director of the Fairbanks Downtown Association, organizer of the festival. "Allowing people to get wet and learn about this great sport from Joe Jacobi, Olympic gold medalist, was the highlight of the whole day for many Fairbanks kids and parents.

"It was, without question, one of the key attractions to this year's festival," she said.

More than 80 people of all

ages climbed into a kayak and received expert instruction from Campbell, Jacobi and Bill "Buckwheat" Overington, owner of Denali Outdoor Center and prime sponsor of the Olympians' visit.

Denali Outdoor Center is a premiere outfitter just outside Denali National Park. DOC is also a full community partner in the Denali Water Safety Program, a nationally award-winning kids program that is part of service learning at the Denali Borough School District. Fairbanks Paddlers and Kids In Motion, a nonprofit group at Denali, also helped sponsor their visit.

At any one time, a dozen



# PADDLERS: Olympic kayaking gold medalist shares skills during various seminars in the Interior

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colorful kayaks filled the river, as new paddlers enjoyed the rare opportunity of Olympic-caliber instruction — even for a short period. Many walked to the river's edge, looked at the kayaks and squeaked, "I'm scared." Most returned to shore exclaiming, "That was fantastic."

The Olympians had fun, too. "The solstice festival is just an extension of everything I already felt about Alaska," Jacobi said. "Alaskans are friendly people with amazing spirit."

This is a return visit for the duo, who run Gold Medal Connections, a traveling paddling school. They presented their Gold Medal Camp at Denali last summer and made several Olympic presentations to community groups.

"Since our program last

year, we never stopped talking about our Gold Medal Camp in Alaska," Jacobi said. "The rivers, the people and the kayaking culture of Alaska is inspirational and something we share with our students all year long."

"The paddlesports culture in Alaska is unlike anything we see anywhere in the country," he added. "River enthusiasts pull together to make whitewater boating and rafting a special experience."

They were both quite amazed to travel next to Tangle Lakes on the Denali Highway, where about 20 dedicated beginning students awaited their expertise. The students drove four hours from Fairbanks and some came even farther — from Anchorage and other parts of the state.

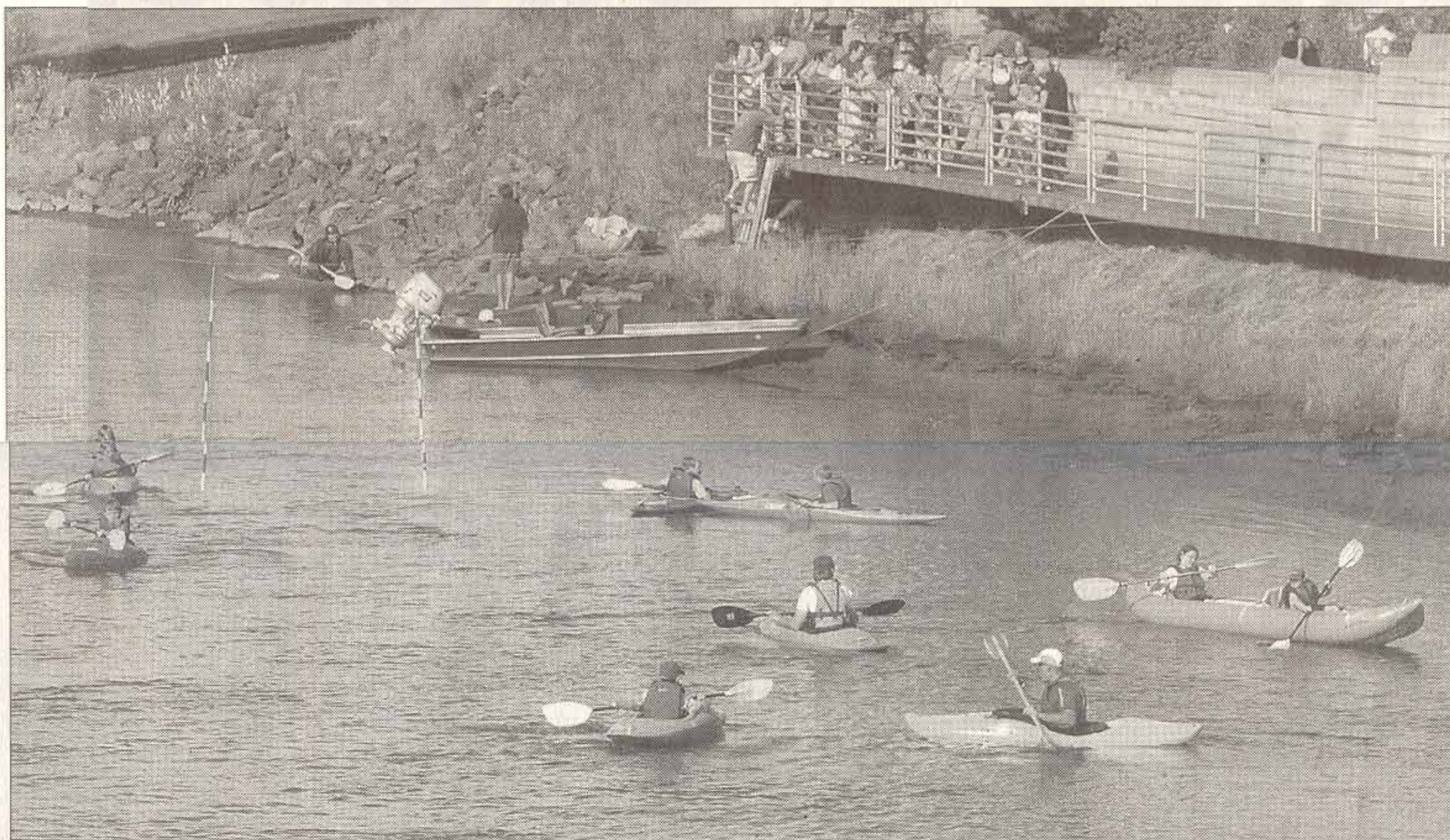
"My main impression is that anyone who would travel to such a remote place and make that commitment of time and energy ... it's an honor that those

people chose to spend the time with us," he said.

That class coincided with the Wild and Scenic Alaska weekend, sponsored by Fairbanks Paddlers. While Campbell and Jacobi of Gold Medal Connections taught kayaking, Canoe Alaska taught canoeing.

Chris Kapps photo

Former Team USA Coach Bob Campbell helps Adam Paskvan of Fairbanks with his paddle during the Tangle Lakes Gold Medal workshop.



Eric Engman/News-Miner

People try their hand at kayaking during a paddling instruction seminar featuring 1992 Olympic kayaking gold medalist Joe Jacobi at the Midnight Sun Festival.

"We had great weather, great instructors, and a great bunch of people from a lot of places around Alaska, learning kayak and canoeing skills," said organizer Andy Reynolds of Fairbanks. "Many were seeing the Tangle Lakes for the first time.

"Enabling more people to really appreciate some of our less well-known but terrific recreational resources like the

Tangle Lakes and Delta Wild and Scenic River was the purpose of the weekend clinics, and I think we accomplished that, and had a lot of fun doing it," he added.

The Olympians aren't done yet. This week, they've been putting eight paddlers through an intense four-day American Canoe Association Instructor Certification Class. The final two days of this week will be spent teaching teens at a

Youth Kayak Camp at Denali Outdoor Center's Otto Lake Headquarters.

Earlier in the week, Denali Outdoor Center held a community barbecue and the Olympians offered free paddling instruction to children and families and offered a short community presentation.

Talks are already under way to plan next year's visit and Emma Wilson wants to make

sure Fairbanks gets included.

"The Downtown Association of Fairbanks was delighted to see the celebration of our wonderful solstice include celebrating our great river," she said. "And we just look forward to hopefully continuing this opportunity to highlight our river and this sport even more in the future."

For more information, see [www.goldmedalconnections.com](http://www.goldmedalconnections.com).