

Community Sailing New Orleans, Inc.

Bringing sailing to all

By Catherine Freeman

Being born into generations of sailors and living on the coast, it was assumed I would spend my childhood summers learning to sail at our local yacht club. Eventually I became a respectable sailor, but I recall spending more time in the water from capsizing than winning races! Now it's for me to understand why my parents encouraged me to continue sailing despite my lack of talent: Sailing teaches valuable skills in teamwork, communication, leadership and self-confidence, and allows for a unique discovery of the environment and importance of environmental stewardship. With the documented benefits gained through sailing and the asset of being situated on Lake Pontchartrain, you'd imagine New Orleans would offer sailing programs galore, but the unsettling truth is that in our city – and many other U.S. cities – unless one has access to a yacht club it's almost impossible to participate in the sport. Fortunately, change is on the horizon.

Hurricane Katrina brought West End to its knees, but gave birth to a focus on rebuilding with broadened public access. President of the City's Municipal Yacht Harbor Management Corporation and lifelong boater John Manard decided, with a small group of individuals, that the time was ripe for a parallel private initiative to expand public benefit by following the example of 400 successful community sailing centers around the country. Countless volunteer hours were spent planning, gathering information from other community sailing programs and developing a diverse, experienced board of directors to ensure a feasible and sustainable building and operating plan.

With a purpose to open Lake Pontchartrain and sailing to the whole population of our area, focusing particularly on those who have not had that opportunity previously – inner city youth, people of all ages with disabilities and adults precluded by



economic obstacles – Community Sailing New Orleans Inc. (CSNO) became a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2010 and subsequently negotiated a half-acre site lease with the City of New Orleans in 2014.

Following extensive fundraising over several years, CSNO recently built and equipped the base facility in West End at a cost of \$1.6 million. They are now moving forward in raising the necessary \$550,000 to present their programs by fall 2020. This includes a fleet of boats to accommodate a range of skill levels and ages, equipment for safety and training, adaptive sailing set-ups, temporary buildings and an Executive Director followed by additional fundraising of \$2 million for a permanent building.

CSNO will have the ability to introduce sailing to over a thousand children each year through partnerships with existing area youth outreach programs and schools. And because the program will be scaled to an ability to pay, it will help remove the historical economic barriers to sailing. Also enhancing the CSNO experience, STEM

programming for students based upon U.S. Sailing's REACH curriculum and environmental education in coordination with the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation will be provided. In addition to area youth, community members of all ages with disabilities, cognitive or physical, and their families will have the opportunity to sail through the use of specialized accessible boats, transfer equipment and trained staff.

With passionate supporters like John Manard it's no surprise the vision of "sailing for all" is on the brink of reality. "Now, after a decade long effort," Manard says, "we have arrived at the crucial moment, when just that final increment of financial support will throw the doors open to hundreds, enrich their lives and improve our community." ■

A little more ...

For more information or to make a contribution to CSNO, visit NolaCommunitySailing.org or call 229-0722.