

COMING TO NEW ORLEANS: SAILING FOR EVERYBODY



Photo courtesy of Southern Yacht Club

The ten-year-old boy watched with curiosity as his father pulled into the driveway. Lashed to the top of the family station wagon was something resembling a light blue box. Inside the car, a varnished wooden pole extended from the dashboard through the tailgate. The "box" was an eight-foot El Toro sailboat, and the pole turned out to be its mast. On this tiny craft, the father taught his kid to sail on the lake behind their Virginia home. The boy didn't realize it at the time, but he had just received a special opportunity that only a fraction of people can take advantage of. The emergence of a community sailing center in New Orleans will make that opportunity available to everyone.

New Orleans has a rich sailing tradition, and Lake Pontchartrain has long been a great sailing venue. For decades, New Orleans has regularly hosted regional, national and international championship regattas in numerous sailboat classes. New Orleans can boast of Olympic medalists, America's Cup crew members and national champions. These days, the West End anchors most of the sailing scene, and virtually all of the south shore's sailboat racing. The West End is also home to the area's two largest yacht clubs, New Orleans Yacht Club (NOYC) and Southern Yacht Club (SYC).

NOYC and SYC take turns hosting regattas throughout the year. They are among the thousands of yacht clubs worldwide that are, and will remain, mainstays in sailing. But yacht clubs are private, membership organizations, and while most have a variety of membership categories (NOYC and SYC both do), the reality is that not everybody who wants to sail in New Orleans will be able to do it from a yacht club. Yacht clubs typically maintain fleets of club-owned boats and a membership can be costly.

Besides the obvious need for proximity to water and access to an expensive boat, you'll need to learn to sail. It isn't rocket science, but persuading a boat to move through the water propelled only by the wind does require some technique. And like just about any other skill

that is best learned with an instructor, learning to sail is not free.

The creation of the Community Sailing Center of New Orleans, at the southeast corner of the outer harbor at West End, will expand sailing opportunities for New Orleanians of all ages and physical ability. Formally Community Sailing New Orleans, Inc (CSNOI), this not-for-profit corporation's mission is to "eliminate the economic and physical obstacles to sailing for

and outreach programs, like the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) and the Louisiana Outdoors Outreach Program (LOOP), as well as local public schools, will create a variety of options for using the sailing center. Family memberships, individual use, sailing classes, group outings and summer camp-style programs open to the public will all be available.

CSNOI will align with existing collegiate sailing programs at Tulane, UNO and Loyola, and is



Rendering courtesy of CSNOI

CSNOI estimates a three-year continuing effort to reach a fully functioning community sailing center in 2016. During this time, private donations will become the lifeblood of the funding necessary to build and resource the center.

all in the greater New Orleans area." CSNOI's President, John Manard, made the distinction that this sailing center will be an asset meant for the entire community, not simply an outgrowth of the existing sailing community. That starts with the eight-member CSNOI Board of Directors, made up of executives in banking, law, other non-profits, journalism and the city's parks department.

Theirs, and other local pro-bono efforts since 2010, have culminated in a facility design, an agreed site lease this year from the city's Municipal Yacht Harbor and a final proposal which is poised to appear before the mayor and city council. "Many U.S. cities already have successful community sailing centers," said Manard, "but this really is a first for New Orleans."

Plans to collaborate with city and state civic

also working with Xavier to develop a sailing program, giving our local colleges a home base at the sailing center. The center's future site will sit atop the current Tulane sailing team's facility, and college sailors will be a likely pool of instructors.

CSNOI estimates a three-year continuing effort to reach a fully functioning community sailing center in 2016. During this time, private donations will become the lifeblood of the funding necessary to build and resource the center. Once it's up and running, reasonable and scalable fees will sustain operations. In the meantime, there are always a few ways to experience sailing. Try out the popular Wednesday Twilight Racing; many friendly boat owners are happy to invite new sailors onboard. — Joel Berry

Joel Berry is a retired Marine Corps Colonel and a local sailor. He thanks his dad for the light blue box.