Advancing maritime education on Martha's Vineyard ~~ www.sailmv.org

## Sail Mobility MV: New Initiative Launches

ANDY NUTTON, director of programs at Sail Martha's Vineyard, spent some of his early years as director of sailing at the Royal Hospital School in Suffolk, England, and he came away from that experience with lasting memories of the sailing center next door. It was the Wolverton Project, one of what are now more than 200 recognized sites in the Royal Yachting Association's Sailability program, which enables people with disabilities to try sailing and to take part regularly.

It wasn't long after his arrival on the Vineyard in the summer of 2017 that Nutton started looking for ways to bring a similar program to Sail Martha's Vineyard.

"At the disabled sailing center right next to us," he recalls, "I would see kids and adults from the most able to the least able, going out in boats and having a great time. It was such a positive thing, their favorite thing. And for the families, two things happened: They were elated to see their loved ones or friends getting out on the water and having a wonderful time, and they would also have

time to be with like-minded people, people with similar life experiences, and this sense of community was built. I had the utmost respect for that whole program."

At Sail MV, Nutton learned the organization's genesis story—how a small group of people saw that too many Island children lacked access to on-the-water experiences, and started a program of free summer lessons in 1992. Expanding that program now to include another under-served group in the Island community makes perfect sense, he says:

"Coming here that first summer, I saw how our operations were run and the people we were reaching. I learned about Camp Jabberwocky, and I learned about Island Autism Group, and I thought: We should be doing something. This would be really simple for us to do."

The program now named Sail Mobility MV began modestly in the summer of 2018, with a few trial-run outings with campers from Camp Jabberwocky and young people from the autism group. It was clear from the very beginning, Nutton says, that Sail MV was onto something powerful and positive.

"We started with Camp Jabberwocky with two test afternoons on our Rhodes 19 that summer," he says. "The idea



Out for a summer sail with Sail Mobility MV.

was to see whether the campers enjoyed it, and whether our staff would be comfortable doing it. It was a big success. Then we did a little tour of the Lagoon on a power boat with kids from Island Autism, and they loved it."

The next step was to see whether such a program could be scalable for Sail MV. Over the winter of 2018 and in the spring of 2019, the organization found grant money from the Tower Foundation. Both Camp Jabberwocky and Island Autism became corporate members of Sail Martha's Vineyard. And more funds specifically for this new program were raised at this summer's Seafood Buffet & Auction.

In the summer of 2019, Sail Mobility made its debut with 16 free two-hour trips out on the water with Island Autism, and eight with the campers of Jabberwocky. "And everyone," says Nutton, "had the most wonderful time.

"The boat would heel over and someone would go, 'Ahh! What's wrong?' and somebody else would go, 'Wheee!' It was great."

Kevin McGrath, who serves on the board of Island Autism and is librarian at the high school, says Sail Mobility MV has been a great addition to the after-school and summer programs his group offers for about 20 young people with autism on the Vineyard.

## A Fine First Summer for Sail Mobility MV

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"A lot of times," says McGrath, "autistic kids would just be sitting at home if they weren't given these kinds of opportunities. There's nothing else like what Sail MV is offering—it's just a wonderful program."

He recalls one boy who refused to get on the sailboat on his first outing to the harbor this summer. "He was so nervous. He ended up watching from shore with one of our staff, and the whole time he was saying, 'I want to go!' We said, 'Hey, we tried to get you onboard. Next time!' That Friday he got on the boat,

and he loved it. It was so great to see him gain that confidence."

"I think Sail Mobility MV is the most exciting thing that's happened at this organization in 2019," says John Kettlewell, executive director of Sail MV. "This organization exists because almost thirty years ago, some people thought it was just wrong that here we are, living on an Island, and some kids only get to experience the water when they ride the ferry here. Sail Mobility MV is the perfect extension of that idea, giving new groups the chance to experience and enjoy the water."

## Rowing Club: 'We're Crazy About Rowing'

If YOU'RE ON the ferry at any season, you've seen them: teams of six or seven rowers, rhythmically gliding across Vineyard Haven Harbor. And if you've thought to yourself, "I'd like to do that someday," you're not alone.

Terre Young has been rowing with Sail Martha's Vineyard's Row MV group for

nearly four years now, ever since retiring as director of Hospice of Martha's Vineyard. Over breakfast with crewmates after a Saturday morning outing in mid-October, she recalls driving to and from work, looking out at the harbor and seeing the 32-foot Cornish pilot gig Grace on the water in summer and its sister gig, Cassie, in the winter.

than a dozen years. The club has about 40 active rowers, who take the rowing gig out on the water every morning, sometimes twice in a morning, and on several afternoons each week.

Rowers dress for the weather and go out at all times of year, except on days when it's especially cold or windy. The club's boats, built in a workshop near Five Corners and launched in 2005 and 2006. Each fall *Grace* is hauled for maintenance and *Cassie* serves as the club's winter rowing boat. "Sail MV takes care of the maintenance," says Villa, "and we're really grateful for that."

It's a diverse group of Islanders who

share a love for their weekly rowing trips—for some they're thriceweekly outings and more. And for most rowers it seems to be a habit that endures. "We've got people like Jean Lewellyn who actually helped build the boats," says Villa. "Aase Jones is in her eighties and still rowing with

still rowing with us—she helped build the boats, too." And Wendy Gray, who's been rowing since *Grace* was launched in 2005, leads a youth rowing program with the club's gigs for the Charter School.

Jude Villa says the rowers have a ready answer for folks who wonder at them for venturing out on chilly mornings in January and February. "People say to us, 'You go out in the winter when it's below freezing? You're crazy!' And we say, 'Yes, we're crazy—we're crazy about rowing."

If you're interested in joining the adult rowing program or going for a free trial row, please contact the Sail MV office at 508-696-7644.



Rowing across Vineyard Haven harbor with Jude Villa at the tiller.

"I'd see the rowers," she says, "and I'd say to myself, 'I'm going to do that.' Joining the rowing club was one of the first things I did when I retired and had the time."

It's great exercise, an encounter with nature and the changing seasons, a nourishing social experience, and an important element of structure to her week, Young says, adding: "One of the things I missed most after retiring from Hospice was being part of a team. This satisfies that completely for me."

Jude Villa, coxswain of the Saturday morning boat, chairs the rowing committee for Row MV of Sail MV, and has been with the program for more thresholds for cancellation are 20 degrees or 20 knots of wind, but Villa emphasizes, "It's the cox's call on the beach."

Crewmate Ulrike Wartner, who joined the rowing club when she moved to the Island year-round in 2015, says that rowing with five or six teammates involves an element of commitment that's powerful. "At 5 o'clock in the morning when you're in a warm bed in the wintertime and you have to get up to row, truthfully, you would not go out on the water if you weren't letting down the other members of your team. But you do go, and once the boat starts moving there are no regrets."

Grace and Cassie are classic wooden



Sail Martha's Vineyard's new Teras arrived this summer, and had an immediate effect supporting the Sail MV syllabus.

## Additions to Fleet Advance SMV Programs

THE ENROLLMENT numbers from Sail MV's summer 2019 program tell a fascinating story. In 2018, Island kids accounted for just 24 percent of the students enrolled in the first levels of paid courses in the summer syllabus. In 2019 that number jumped to 76 percent—even as overall enrollment was up for the year.

"That was a huge change," says Andy Nutton, director of programs for Sail Martha's Vineyard. "People were seeing that their kids had an absolute ball in the free introductory classes, and they were saying, 'This is worth \$300 for two more weeks.' I think it shows that people on the Vineyard are now seeing our program as so much more than a summer child care option."

Much of this change is thanks to the new syllabus Sail MV has introduced, which takes a rigorous approach to the instruction of sailing skills without losing the element of sheer fun—"for the kids to participate," says Nutton, "it has to be cool."

And for the kids, going fast is definitely cool. This is where the new fleet introduced by Sail MV over the past years has made a difference.

Sail MV added half a dozen RS Feva sailboats to its instructional fleet in the summer of 2017, and this year introduced eleven RS Teras. The effect of these new boats on his summer faculty's ability

to teach sailing, Nutton says, has been transformative.

Each sailboat is a teaching platform that needs to be appropriate for the learning child, he explains. And without the Fevas and Teras as stepping-stones along the way, the jump from entry-level Optimist prams to racing 420s (raced in competition by the high school varsity team) was just too big for many kids.

Sail MV now puts a fleet of sailboats out on the water every summer day that offers a natural progression for children as they learn. "We saw development in children this summer who started with Messing Around in Boats in our prams, and at the end of two weeks were doing things in the Teras that they never could have managed. They go out in these boats—they might fall over but they get right back up again, climb in and sail off without bailing, without worrying about the boat sinking. And they go faster, which of course is what the kids want to do."

One more change this summer was the replacement of Sail MV's flatiron skiffs with bright orange safety boats built by the Dutch manufacturer, Whaly. Five brand-new Whaly 370 rescue boats were delivered to Sail MV in June, and they were out all summer patrolling the Lagoon when classes were underway.

The heavy flatiron skiffs are great

harbor work boats, says Nutton, but far from ideal as safety craft: "Having worked in the watersports industry for 20 years, I'm aware of the importance of safety boats that are maneuverable, boats that are quick and safe at the same time, boats that are easy to handle and resilient to the conditions they're put in." The Whalys are quick and maneuverable with one or two people on board, safe and stable with eight. They're stackable in the off-season, they cut Sail MV's fuel use by a third this summer, and the faculty and students love them. And by selling skiffs to fund their acquisition, Sail MV even saw a modest profit.

The Whalys, says Nutton, are "both terrific safety boats and teaching platforms. We used them for programs like our introduction to marine ecology, taking kids out to see the osprey nests and the shellfish hatchery. And our teachers took them out to work with kids in the windsurfing classes."

In their bright rescue-orange color, Sail MV's new safety boats are impossible to miss. Sail MV's director, John Kettlewell, is as delighted with the Whalys as Andy Nutton. "I think it's neat," he says, "that we have safety boats that are actually safety boats now. This addition has increased the safety of our summer classes, and that's really important."

## Varsity Sailing Team Piles up the Victories

And the Burr, coach of the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School varsity sailing team since 2006, has enjoyed watching his young sailors become the team that nobody wants to race. "Year in and year out," he says, "we're as good as it gets, program-wise. We work hard to get those kids who do want to race where they need to be in order to compete. And these kids really know how to sail."

In his  $14^{\rm th}$  year of coaching the Vineyarders, Burr can still wax rhapsodic describing a perfectly executed roll tack, or the sequence of moves that wins a team race. But he sounds even happier describing the group of young people he's working with on the water this year.

"This is one of the best teams I've coached," he says. "It's not

team's consistent success, he says, is the farm team program also operated by Sail MV, which cultivates young sailors who show an interest in racing in their middle-school years.

On the last weekend of September, Sail Martha's Vineyard and the regional high school hosted some 80 student-athletes from 11 schools on Lagoon Pond for the Arnold Brown Invitational Regatta. This event, which honors the late Arnold Brown for his support of high school and junior sailing on the Vineyard, is a qualifier for the ISSA Mallory Doublehanded Championship, the premier racing event of the fall. The Vineyarders won, qualifying for the Mallory for the first time ever. And thanks to a second-place finish in a qualifying race at Sail Black Rock in Bridgeport, Conn., on Sept. 14,

the Vineyarders are also headed to New Orleans, the week before Thanksgiving, to sail in the Great Oaks Invitational Regatta, a national one-division event limited to 30 schools and one boat each.

Hosting the Arnold Brown Regatta, says Coach Burr, was "a good day, a lot of work, a lot of fun." Two members of Burr's team, Zach Ward and Miles Wolff, took turns that day racing and helping out with Sail MV's work hosting the event. "Having a second safety boat out there all day was huge, a big help," says the coach. "I've never had kids before who were licensed and capable of doing that work with me."

The Vineyarders' convincing win at the Arnold Brown Regatta also gives the team confidence as it looks toward the spring high school racing season of 2020. Last year Martha's Vineyard

finished the season with a number 11 ranking in New England. Looking ahead, says Coach Burr, "We're aiming to qualify for the Mark Trophy (now called the President's Trophy)." That event is reserved for the top eight racing teams in all New England.

"All of us at Sail MV are proud of the Vineyard high school team and its accomplishments," says John Kettlewell, the director of Sail Martha's Vineyard. This organization provides the sailboats and the Boston Whalers that chase after them, the gear from wetsuits to life jackets, and all the shore-side facilities that support the team in its sailing on the Lagoon.

Coach Burr states it simply: "This program wouldn't exist without Sail MV."



Rounding the first mark: High school varsity sailors in team racing competition against Sharon on the Lagoon.

just the competition. First and foremost, I'd say it's that they all love hanging out together. They all get along very well. They all love sailing."

And the results of that chemistry have been impressive. In two weekends of competition this May at the Hyannis Yacht Club, the Vineyard varsity first won the Cape and Islands Team Racing title, and then the Cape and Islands Fleet Racing title. It's something the Vineyarders have never done before, and that accomplishment helped qualify them for entry in the Terk Trophy competition in Maine later that month.

Coach Burr lost seniors Katie Morse, Christian Schmidt, and Alex Nagle to graduation in June, but his team has lost none of its winning momentum this fall. One secret of the

## Arriving in a New Port: Reflections on An Eventful First Year with Sail MV



All smiles at the water's edge — a reminder of why we do our work at Sail Martha's Vineyard.

MY INTRODUCTION to Sail Martha's Vineyard began inauspiciously when I needed a 5 a.m. wakeup call to catch the first ferry out of Woods Hole prior to a November 2018 gale. Despite the lashing rain I was met at the Vineyard Haven dock by Peggy Schwier, president of Sail MV, and we were soon having a



Onboard my sailboat, Minke.

delicious hot breakfast at the Black Dog. All that day the rain and wind reminded me we were offshore on an island, an appropriate backdrop to a day of introductions and interviews for a job with a mission to connect islanders with the sea.

That first cheerful greeting by Peggy in the midst of the storm has since been reinforced by

the many people I have met all over the Island who both share a passion for the Island and the sea, and a desire to provide opportunities for others to experience the maritime world that surrounds us. When I'm asked what brought me here, and they hear that I'm working for Sail MV, the inevitable response is, "How can I help?"

In my sailing travels from Labrador to South America, that's

the mantra of water people everywhere. Those who venture off the beach and onto the water instantly sense they are now in a place where nature rules. Yes, it is beautiful and often peaceful, but the next storm may be about to blast up Vineyard Sound, we need to make sure the current is favorable in Woods Hole, and the anchor has to be properly shackled to the rode. To know those things we depend on a network of water people who work together: meteorologists, harbormasters, the Coast Guard, fellow boaters, the people who build and repair our boats, the person who writes the GPS software, and on and on.

Sail MV depends on the support of a network of Islanders to help us teach how to make that first tentative row off the beach that leads to raising sail and navigating first the Lagoon and maybe the ocean beyond. I am proud to be helping Islanders connect to the sea.

"How can you help?" Please consider donating to Sail MV knowing that the ferry captain was once a child rowing off the beach for the first time, those oysters you love came thanks to someone who navigated around the Island, and just about everything in your home is there because a network of water people worked together. Thanks so much for your support.

John Kettlewell Executive Director

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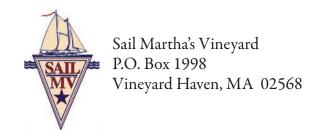
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