

Sail MV in 2021: A Summer of Successes

FOR SAIL MV as for so many other enterprises, finding the “new normal” this year hasn’t been a simple matter of returning to the way things were before the pandemic struck in 2020. It has required creativity, care, and a willingness to revisit familiar ways of doing things – always with an eye toward the organization’s core mission of celebrating the Island’s maritime heritage and connecting Vineyarders to the waters that surround us.

The biggest news for Sail MV in 2021 was the return of its eight-week summer instructional programs on the Lagoon. Pandemic concerns had shut those classes down entirely the summer before. This year, with new safety protocols in place, Sail MV was back in business at Sailing Camp Park – and the children loved it.

“We did have to deal with staff shortages this summer, as many Island organizations had to do,” says John Kettlewell, Sail MV’s executive director. “But we still had nearly 400 children enrolled in our instructional programs. In an ordinary summer we might have 450, so we were very close to maximum numbers this year.”

And it was clear early on this year that after the long months of lockdown, people were hungry for Sail MV’s summer offerings. “Everybody seemed to be just bursting with wanting to get out and do things again,” says Kettlewell. “By mid-May, we could see that we were going to fill many of our classes, and by mid-July, almost everything was sold out.”

“As it turned out, despite all the challenges, we had a safe summer. We did have to apply some new protocols – kids were not allowed in the boathouse building; we had masking and hand sanitation stations; and we reduced our class sizes a little bit.”

Andrew Nutton, Sail MV’s program director, says the focus of the summer instructional programs has always been equally on safety and fun – and this year safety got plenty of extra attention. “Our safety record is something we’re really proud of,” he says, “and we did have a good summer this year.”

The organization’s recent investments in new equipment, including modern safety boats, has greatly increased its ability to present a safe summer program at Sailing Camp, he

says. Nutton also made sure there were early meetings with instructors every day, frequent debriefings and lots of oversight. He’s also grateful for the program’s setting: “The Lagoon really is the safest body of water around here,” he says. “It’s just the perfect setting for the work we do with these kids.”

A perfect setting – and not just for kids. This summer the Sail MV staff was out on the water three days a week, after classes, giving private sailing lessons on the Lagoon. “We offered way more private lessons this summer,” says Nutton, “both for adults and kids in the afternoons from 4 to 6 o’clock on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. After being cooped up for eighteen months, there was just such a demand to get out and do things this year.”



Sail MV’s signature eight-week instructional program on the Lagoon was back this summer.

Setting safe limits on class size meant turning away a few kids as this year’s summer program played out, says Kettlewell. “We had people begging us – can’t you sign up just a couple more kids? – and we had to tell them no, it wouldn’t be safe. We do expect to get back to a more completely normal season next year. Part of that will be having a full staff, which we expect to be able to do next summer.”

Summer Events: Virtual and In-Person

Sail MV held its annual Seafood Buffet & Auction as a

2021 Saw Resurgence of Sail MV Programs

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virtual event for a second year in 2021, but there were also small – and successful – steps toward in-person programs that connect the community of the organization's supporters.

After the online fund-raiser, Sail MV held two open house events – social gatherings of modest size – at the Sailing Camp property. “That was kind of a breakthrough for us, getting back to in-person gatherings at our boathouse,” says Kettlewell. In July and again in August, he says, “We just invited people down to chat, have a nice evening on the waterfront – and at one of those events we were able to present Alison Shaw with her own Walter Cronkite Award.”

Looking ahead, he says: “Our virtual events were great successes for fund-raising last year and again this year. But now we’re thinking about how we can begin reconnecting with people in person. The open houses were small events held under a tent with lots of fresh air – just sixty or



Rowers enjoy a September outing in Vineyard Haven harbor on the pilot gig Grace.

says Kettlewell: “We had to adapt. And everybody had a great time.”

Maritime Studies: Getting Real

After being thrown onto online

curve for everyone, really,” he says. “It made us think hard about subjects in the curriculum that could be translated into the way we had to teach.”

Now Maritime Studies classes are again being held in-person at the high school, where Nutton can watch over a shoulder as a student charts a course on a navigational map or draws the curves of a sailboat hull. Looking back, he says, “I think that considering the hand we were dealt, we were able to do some fantastic teaching. We obviously did something right, because the Maritime Studies class this year is the largest it’s ever been.”

Rowing MV Resumes

One of the Sail Martha’s Vineyard programs hit hardest by the pandemic was the MV Rowing Club, whose members pack into a classic 32-foot Cornish pilot gig, six rowers and one coxswain at a time (plus the occasional canine companion), for vigorous outings on the Lagoon and in Vineyard Haven Harbor.

The pandemic forced a pause in the rowing club’s outings that ended up lasting 15 months. In May of this year, the rowing club resumed with strict protocols – and now the gig Grace is taken out regularly with about two dozen rowers taking part.

“There was just no safe way to go out – there was no way to social-distance on the boat,” says Jude Villa, the longtime chairman of the rowing club. “This



For two semesters, Andy Nutton taught Maritime Studies classes from home.

seventy people between the two – and it was wonderful to see people again, outdoors and in a safe manner.”

Another mainstay of the summer sailing season, the Vineyard Cup Regatta, was also back this year after being suspended in 2020. A fleet of some 40 boats participated in two days of great sailing on July 10 and 11. As with so many of Sail MV’s programs this year,

platforms by the pandemic for the spring and fall of 2020, Sail MV’s vocational program at the regional high school, Maritime Studies, has also been moving back toward in-person instruction.

Andrew Nutton, who teaches the Maritime Studies classes, says the central challenge of last year was refashioning the syllabus into something that could be taught well remotely. “It was a learning



A perfect day of racing: Sail MV hosted the annual Arnold Brown Regatta on Sept. 18.

spring the rowing committee got together and reached out to all our members, asking who was interested in coming back. With the people who replied, we put together a schedule, and now we're going out five days a week.

"We're opening up to new rowers," says Villa, "and anyone who's interested can contact Sail MV. Everyone does have to be fully vaccinated to go out with us."

The pandemic forced the longest break from rowing that she's known in nearly two decades, Villa says. She remembers the joy of her first outing with a group in May: "It felt really great to be back – there's nothing like being out on the water with a group of friends that you're so used to being with."

Racing Season Successes

After the disappointment of a spring 2020 season that had to be canceled, the high school varsity sailing program sponsored by Sail MV was back, albeit on a reduced scale, in 2021. "We were somewhat restricted this spring," says Coach Andrew Burr. "But the high school did allow us to travel to some quad meets with Tabor, Milton and Falmouth. As COVID restrictions were lightening up, we made a mad dash in the last week and a half of the school season to secure a venue for a Cape & Islands championship, and we ultimately got it done at the Hyannis Yacht Club. It was a great event – our team sailed really well and we ended up winning the Cape & Islands championship in team

racing. It was a nice way for the seniors to cap off their years with us."

Coach Burr and assistant coach Nutton are expecting to field a team of between 15 and 20 young sailors on the varsity team in the spring of 2022. Meanwhile this fall, the Sail MV fleet is out on the Lagoon four afternoons a week, weather permitting – two days with the varsity sailors and two days with what the coaches are calling their development team of fifth and sixth-graders who are interested in competitive sailing.

One day in September, Coach Burr says, "We took the kids out trapezing for the first time – we had two varsity sailors driving boats, and I drove, and we put them on traps on the 420s. When you get them on the water, get them going as fast as they've ever gone in a boat – they say wow, this is really cool." He adds with a smile: "It's setting the hook."

One of Sail MV's most recent racing events was the annual Arnold Brown Regatta, held on the Lagoon on Sept. 18. Nine teams and more than 70 people took part, filling two buses back and forth from the ferry, says Coach Burr: "It was the strongest field we've ever had here."

"We had idyllic conditions, and sailors came from all over New England – three Maine teams, two Rhode Island teams and a bunch of Massachusetts teams."

Everyone went home happy – and well-fed, says Coach Burr: "Caleb Burt went out at lunchtime and got 14 pizzas."

Regrets, and a Look Ahead

Not every Sail MV program came back, not all the way, in this summer that saw the Island emerging from the pandemic.

One of Andy Nutton's regrets for the 2021 season was the inability to advance the Sail Mobility program first launched in 2019. He has already begun recruiting the staff which will enable Sail MV to bring its summer programs back to full capacity in 2022. "That will include Sail Mobility," he says, "which is such great fun, and which we very much missed this year."

And Sail MV's focus on equity and inclusion, which emerged last year, will get new emphasis in the year ahead, John Kettlewell promises. "This summer it was hard for Sail MV to be proactive about all the issues around diversity and equity and inclusion," he says. "But over this winter, we're planning more direct outreach to our schools and to youth programs around the Island."

He concludes: "One of the beauties of a crisis like the one we've experienced is that it focuses the mind wonderfully. We did tighten our belts as much as possible over the past year. We looked at every line item on the budget and asked ourselves, is this necessary – and if it is, can we do it more inexpensively?"

"We came through this storm in good shape, and Sail MV is going to come back even stronger next year."

Back on Course: A Note from the Director



Classic sailing craft gathered in July for the 15th annual Vineyard Cup Regatta. (photo by Holly Westcott)

AFTER WE ALL shared a very difficult pandemic year in 2020, Sail MV entered 2021 cautiously and with many questions yet to be answered. However, we finished 2020 in a good financial position, thanks to strong support from many individual and business donors supplemented by government aid programs. Measures put in place since 2019 meant we were able to run a lean and efficient ship with minimal crew and expense.

This year we were determined to get back to teaching as many students as possible, despite the continuing pandemic requirements and difficulties. Summer 2021 was a huge success, with a full slate of programs, close to 400 students, and all done without any health issues. By June the rowers were back on the water. In July we brought back the Vineyard Cup Regatta, with more than 40 boats participating. By September the high school sailing team and the fall school sailors were back out on the Lagoon, where Sail MV hosted the Arnold Brown Regatta. In-person teaching of Maritime Studies resumed at the high school.

Credit for this remarkable rebound must go to Director of Programs, Andy Nutton, and his staff, and to all the parents, students, rowers, and racers for their cooperation and care.

The uncertainties of the pandemic this summer forced us once again to cancel our live events; however, the virtual fundraiser held in July was successful and featured our presentation of the Walter Cronkite Award to Alison Shaw. We raised close to \$90,000, which helps us provide more than \$100,000 in free classes to Island youth. And with an outdoor tent provided courtesy of Tilton Tents, we held two

open houses at the Boathouse on Lagoon Pond. It was great to reconnect in person with friends, while also introducing newcomers to our facilities, boats, and programs. We hope to do more open house events in the near future!

Looking ahead, Sail MV plans to bring the traditional Seafood Buffet & Auction back to the Vineyard Haven waterfront on July 7, 2022, followed by the Vineyard Cup Regatta July 9 and 10. We hope you'll save the dates.

Approaching the end of 2021, Sail MV is in a stronger financial position than it has been in years, and with our streamlined and more efficient operations we have a good foundation for gradually expanding programs and pursuing important initiatives. Improving diversity and inclusion is an ongoing effort along with Sail Mobility. We plan on doing more direct outreach to schools and civic organizations to let people know that sailing is an option that can build skills, develop confidence, and open new opportunities.

As always, the less glamorous parts of an organization behind the scenes can be among the most important. In 2021 we replaced some of our floats (about \$12,000), used in our summer programs, and we are eyeing needed boat upgrades for the high school sailing team. We know we can count on you to support these efforts. Thank you!

John J. Kettlewell
Executive Director

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Alison Shaw receives the Cronkite Award from SMV president Dan Pesch and former president Peggy Schwier.

SAIL MARTHA'S VINEYARD presented its Walter Cronkite Award to the celebrated Island artist and photographer Alison Shaw at the 2021 Virtual Seafood Buffet & Auction, held on July 8. The award, given by Sail MV each year since 2010 in the name of Walter Cronkite, an early and prominent supporter of the organization, honors an individual who has advanced the appreciation of maritime culture on Martha's Vineyard.

"Her ability to record and give us images of not only boats being built ... but boats on the water, and our marine environment, has been absolutely remarkable," said Dan Pesch, president of Sail MV, in his introductory remarks. "She is part of the Island, she is part of the culture, and we are thankful to be able to give her this award and honor her contribution."

Shaw is in distinguished company as the ninth recipient of the Cronkite Award. Previous recipients are Ray Ellis, Matthew Stackpole, Capt. Robert S. Douglas, Ross Gannon and Nat Benjamin, S. Bailey Norton, Jr., Nathaniel Philbrick, Steven Ewing, and Brock and Hope Callen.

When she learned she had been selected for the award, Shaw said, "I especially appreciate it from the perspective of being an artist/photographer with a passion for boats and nautical scenes as the subject matter for my art." Shaw's work may be found on her website, alisonshaw.com.

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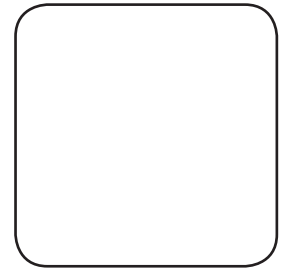
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P.O. Box 1998
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SUMMER PROGRAMS SIGNUP OPENS IN JANUARY 2022

Registration for Sail MV's 2022 summer sailing programs will open on Tuesday, January 18. Visit our website to sign up for next summer's instructional programs on the Lagoon.

SAIL MARTHA'S VINEYARD AWARDS SCHOLARSHIP TO CALEB BURT

The 2021 Rappaport Scholarship to assist a high school senior's further education in maritime studies was presented this spring to Caleb Burt, who is now attending Massachusetts Maritime Academy.

Caleb was a graduate of Sail MV's summer programs, a member of the high school sailing team, and took Sail MV's Maritime Studies classes at the high school.

The Rappaport Scholarship was created and funded in 2012 by the Rappaport family in honor of the late Donald Rappaport.



Sail MV hosted two modest gatherings at the Sailing Camp boathouse in the summer of 2021. Plans are being made now for more in-person celebrations in the year ahead.

SAVE THE DATES

31st Annual Seafood Buffet & Auction:

July 7, 2022

Vineyard Cup Regatta: July 9-10, 2022