



# For the love of SAILING

PHOTO BY CHRIS CHAMBERS

by Carrie Scozzaro

## Stowaways welcome at weekly races

**O**N A LATE SUMMER AFTERNOON AT CITY BEACH, the vista unfolds like a vast blue sail. One can watch the remnants of a day at the lake give way to evening. Kids pedal through the park, beachgoers linger, boats putter in the bay, and Canada geese have emerged to reclaim grassy areas.

And if it's a Thursday evening, there will surely be a group of folks gathering at Windbag Marina in preparation for a friendly sailing competition in the bay.

The Thursday Evening Races, as they're known, attract a jovial crowd, mostly members of the Sandpoint Sailing Association in shorts and deck shoes, but also a few curious onlookers who have little or no sailing experience. All listen intently to instructions for the

## SAILING

Photos: Carrie Scozzaro and Annie-Pflueger



two-and-a-half lap race that occurs every Thursday from June 7 through September 6. (The final "Thursday" race is actually held on Saturday, September 15, and starts at noon.) It all begins with a captain's meeting at 5:30 p.m.

Bruce Robertson, who is the association's commodore, and his wife Barb Perusse (she serves as vice commodore) are amongst a handful of the SSA's roughly 75 members who make their boats available to guests for the 2- to 3-hour excursion. Theirs is a 1974 Cal 229 sailboat, sometimes referred to as a 'Classic Plastic' boat, said Robertson, explaining "It was designed and made when fiberglass was new and factories tended to overbuild the hulls, not realizing how strong and durable the material is."

With more than two decades of freshwater sailing between them—Perusse has some additional experience ocean sailing—the couple appreciate the opportunity to share their love of sailing, and hope to further people's interest in the sport through the SSA.

This summer, for example, SSA will again offer 2-hour classes for four days each through Sandpoint Parks & Recreation: June

18-21, July 16-19, and August 13-16. Fees are reasonable (last year they were \$35/person for the 8-hour program) and SSA plans to offer a second session if the first one fills up for each timeframe. They're also working with Parks & Rec to offer private lessons.

Another option for would-be sailors, even those without their own boat, said Robertson, is to join SSA. Their low membership fees entitle members to use one of the association's five Holder 14-foot dinghies or the group's newest acquisition, a Capri 18-foot fixed-keel sailboat.

Another good first step in learning to sail, of course, is to tag along Thursday evenings, at no charge, where boats range from the beast owned by Robertson and Perusse to smaller, faster boats like the Red Hot Rookie, a J24 model skippered by Ray Henriksen.

The J24 is like a sports car compared to Perusse and Robertson's boat, which is more like a van, explained Robertson. Christened the Cloud Nine, this van of a boat is a dream for first-timers to experience lake sailing. While the helmsman steers from the rear of the 29-foot boat, guests can stretch out along the port

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Photos: Carrie Scozzaro and Tracy Cooper




(left) and starboard (right) bow or front, mindful to stay out of the way of the crew (and the powerful sail).

And if a passenger expresses an interest in learning, there are few more enthusiastic and patient teachers than Robertson and Perusse, whose careers have been more or less dedicated to public service: he is with the city's Public Works department, while she has a background in child advocacy and is a licensed professional counselor.

Leaning down, one can feel the spray of water, which increases as the boat gains speed. Looking out, the view includes City Beach and the marina, the distant shore and mountains, other boats, and the ever-changing hues of the lake. The sounds vary: waves against the boat; the halyard slapping on the aluminum mast in a varying rhythm of wind and motion; the distant hum of traffic as you near the highway, which is quickly pushed away as the boat turns and the wind rushes into your ears.

The SSA dates to the 1980s, when a number of sailing buddies coined a name for the group, wrote bylaws and established a

checking account for the nonprofit. In 1997, a handful of enthusiasts officially launched the SSA, which has evolved to include year-round social gatherings, as well as races, classes and other events designed to celebrate and promote sailing for existing and would-be members. Because when it comes to sailing, one can never have too much experience.

**“You can learn to sail in about an hour, but to sail well, it’s a lifetime of learning,” said Robertson. **

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