



A HISTORY OF THE PORTLAND YACHT CLUB JUNIOR SAILING PROGRAM

– BY LEIGH PALMER, PAST COMMODORE
AND FORMER JUNIOR PROGRAM OFFICER

On June 11, 1922, the Portland Yacht Club authorized the creation of a Junior Membership category for people aged 12 to 18 years. The annual dues were \$5.00. Soon thereafter, the original Portland Junior Yacht Club was formed, with the idea that junior members, when they became adults, could become regular members regardless of the membership caps of that time.

In 1947, the Club moved from its in-town location on Merchant's Wharf to what had been a seasonal cottage on the waterfront in Falmouth Foreside, merging with the Falmouth Yacht Club. An instrumental player in this merger and move was member Hasket Derby.

In 1950, Hasket Derby helped to bring a fleet of Turnabout sailing dinghies to PYC with the goal of establishing a youth sailing program through the PJYC. Thus, in 1950, the "PJYC Boating Program", now known as the Portland Yacht Club Junior Sailing Program, was born.



In the mid to late 1960s, PYC Junior Sailing came under the direction of William Stanley, alias "Captain Fun." Bill introduced many new aspects to the program, including the original Tuesday Night Races (still raced today, but on Monday nights). Many of PYC Junior Sailing's perpetual trophies were introduced during this period of the program's history, and much of the current tradition of the program came from Bill Stanley. A new emphasis on participation in NAYRU/USYRU ladder events including the Sears cup and Prince of Wales match racing was Bill's idea, leading to several State and New England champions.

Through the 50's and 60's, PYC Junior Sailing had primarily utilized the original privately-owned fleet of Turnabouts in daily sailing lessons, with the introduction of Ravens and Lightnings for the older crews. A succession of faster, double-handed boats, such as the Albacores, were used in the upper levels of the program. Around 1966, the International 420 became popular among junior members. The I420 was lighter and faster than boats used previously, and the I420 flourished for almost a decade as the primary racing boat of PYC Junior Sailing.



By 1975, a succession of new builders of the I420 had helped to make the class uneven, and the boat fell out of favor with junior sailors. Around this time, PYC's racing juniors started moving into a newer, single-handed design, the Laser. Also by this time, the old Turnabouts, the original fleet brought to PYC by Hasket Derby in 1950, was worn out. In 1976, PYC finally retired the old Turnabout Fleet that had served the program for over 25 years, replacing them with a fleet of 14 club-owned Widgeons, a sturdy 14' sloop design made by O'Day. The Widgeons remained the workhorse of basic sailing instruction at PYC well into the 1990's. By the 1976-77 seasons, PYC Junior Sailing under

the direction of Dave Whiting, was using Widgeons and Lasers as the primary program boats. Also in the late 1970's the PYC Junior Sailing Program moved from its own clubhouse (the current steward shed), where it had held classes for more than 25 years, into the new Junior Room upstairs at the club, where the program is still housed to this day.

In the 1980's, a new boat design known as the Club 420 was becoming popular at many New England clubs. The Club 420 was a I420, with less sail area. This was a specifically to withstand the rigors of college programs, an area where the short. By 1987 the PYC Junior others, Tim Tolford, Dave White, and expand the program and start moving Sailing became a full day program, five days a week, seven hours a day, into three 3-week sessions. This represented a major turning point in the history of PYC Junior Sailing. The shift to Club 420s and the expansion of the sailing day soon turned the program from a decent regional program into one of the top junior sailing programs.



heavier, sturdier version of the boat that was designed heavy use with junior and I420 had always come up Committee, led by among Leigh Palmer, decided to into Club 420s. PYC Junior with kids at all levels sailing in a nine week schedule split



In the early 1990's, under the direction of Geoff Phelps and later Tracy Brennan, PJYC began moving the basic levels of the program away from the worn-out Widgeons into Optimists. Optimists are small 8 foot single-handed dinghies that had been popular in the US Southeast for many decades, but are now raced throughout the world in a very organized national and international competition. The Optimist, with its small size and simple rigging, is a perfect design for basic

sailing and introductory racing. Starting in the early 90's, PJYC helped along by the contributions of Peter Curtis and Scott Fox, began purchasing club-owned Optimists, and by 1997, had established a formal traveling PJYC Optimist Team. The last Widgeon was retired after the 1995 season.

Starting in 1988, PYC Junior Program began a remarkable streak of qualifying sailors for either the Bemis (youth double-handed) or Sears (three-person keel boat) National Championships. Indeed, PJYC had somebody competing in the Sears, Bemis or Smythe finals for something like 11 of 13 years, which probably no other club in the country did. These were ladder events in those days, and Area A was such that a club had to choose to which event to send a team – either Sears or Bemis, thus cutting chances of placing in half. Pete Levesque noted that "often times the hardest steps on the ladder were the club eliminations and then Area A's. The run started with Thor and Erik Pedersen, then Carter White and Jamie Carter (2x), then Charlie Bernard and Steve Churchill (2x), then Jeff Nelson to the Smythe, then Pete and Nichol (3x), then Ben Gent and Liz Bancroft (2x). Plus we had some great finishes at all of the big events: Nichol and I won a bunch of things, Ben Gent finished 4th at Youth Champs and North Americans."

Indeed, in 1997, the PYC team of skipper Pete Levesque and crew Nichol Ernst won the Bemis Trophy, Youth National Championship and the Club 420 North Americans within a year. In 2006, skipper Alan Palmer and crew Kati Gullick won the Bemis Trophy again in the name of PYC on hot Galveston Bay, TX. The list of yacht clubs that have their name engraved on the

Bemis Trophy two or more times consists of three clubs: Long Beach Yacht Club in southern California, the St. Petersburg Yacht Club and the Portland Yacht Club.

PYC had become a well-respected pipeline to college sailing producing top talent for many nationally ranked college sailing teams. Five former PYC Junior sailors have been named ICOSA All Americans: Carter White (Hobart/William Smith '98), Pete Levesque (Tufts '03), Sarah Himmelfarb, crew (Yale '06), Alan Palmer (Harvard '11), and Deirdre Lambert (Dartmouth '15). Pete was a runner up for ICOSA's Sailor of the Year for three years, and Deirdre was named Women's Sailor of the Year in 2013 and 2014. Pete went on to race as a member of the Silver Panda Team, based out of New York YC which won the Hinman Trophy (Adult National Team Racing Championship) four times in five years. Chris Poole, Maine Maritime Academy '12, has been world-ranked and nationally-ranked in match racing in 2013 and 2014, and continues to compete as Riptide Racing.

In 1995, UNUM Insurance was a major sponsor of Young America, an America's cup challenger skippered by Kevin Mahaney of Bangor, ME. PYC joined six other yacht clubs as co-sponsors of Young America along with the host yacht club. Each of these eight clubs sent a junior team to a match racing event in St. Petersburg FL where Pete Levesque, Nichol Ernst, Rachel White and Steve Churchill sailed to second place. Then these same clubs sent two Junior Teams to the Fort Worth Boat Club to race on J-22s. The PJYC teams finished first in fourteen of the sixteen races. They took a first (Pete Levesque, RC Schmidt, Luke Rioux and Ben True) and second (Ben Gent, Adam Gent, Brigham Prescott and Eric Piasio) --the only possible outcome when it was the two PJYC boats racing against each other. That is 15 BULLETS and one second out of sixteen races. This can be best described as a "thorough trouncing" of the competition.

Portland Yacht Club hosted the Optimist New England Championships at East End Beach in 2003, one of several national championships held by USODA (United States Optimist Dinghy Association). This event drew 247 boats, including sailors from Ireland, Spain, Bermuda, Canada and the Virgin Islands. PJYC's own Emily Lambert (Harvard '12) placed second in that championship. Opti sailors from PJYC have qualified and represented the USA in various international championships for North America, South America, and Europe.

PJYC sailors have also earned the title of Maine State Optimist Champion and also Maine State 420 Champions.

There has been a return to emphasizing the learn-to-sail programs at PJYC in recent years, led by Directors Peter Colesworthy, Meg Coon, Skip Yale and Chris Morin. The Adventure program has been wildly successful, and utilizes a J-24 recently purchased by the PJYC. This program gives older sailors who are not interested in racing a way to learn boating and navigational skills in a more social manner.

PJYC has a well-established national-caliber program featuring many levels of instruction, including formal traveling race teams in Optis and Club 420s. PJYC remains a racing power in New England, with travel teams competing throughout the region on an ongoing basis. Our programs are full most sessions with new and young sailors eager to learn sailing skills and have fun on the water. And perhaps most importantly, PJYC has maintained its traditions of excellence started by Hasket Derby and helped along by a long list of important contributors throughout the years.

Past Junior Activities Directors on the Portland Yacht Club Board

1973-1974	Howard Reiche
1975-1976	Clark Smith
1977-1978	Lawrence Wilson
1979-1980	Ted Bernard
1981-1982	John Albin
1983-1984	Thomas Cox
1985-1987	Leigh Palmer
1988-1989	Tim Tolford
1990	Bob Twinem
1991-1994	Bob Schmidt
1995-1997	Peter Curtis
1998-2002	Scott Fox
2003-2005	Peter Colesworthy
2006-2007	Meg Coon
2008-2010	Skip Yale
2011- 2014	Chris Morin

Past Junior Program Directors

1963-1964	Dick Brown
1966-1967	Gordon Corbett
1968-1970	Bill Stanley
1971	Clark Smith
1973-1975	Nat Russell & Tim Tolford
1977-1978	David Whiting
1983-1986	Muzzy Barton
1987-1988	Robert Davis
1989-1991	Greg Marrow
1992	Geoff Phelps
1993-1995	Tracy Brennan
1996	Dick Lathrop
1997-1999	Steve Williams
2000	Liz Rollins
2001-2002	Chrissie Jurzcak
2003-2005	Steve Williams
2006-2007	Molly White
2008-2012	Kelly Franklin
2013-2014	Arthur Blodgett

Additional Notes by Peter Levesque

The story of the program is often told through the race team since they generate results and trophies. But the Widgeons added a lot to the program. It was a really nice thing to be an 8 or 9 year old and be stuffed into a boat with 3 or 4 other munchkins and go on an adventure to a far away island and roam World War II forts. On the long sails to the islands we would make up games and sing songs in the boat. Really silly camp stuff. Once on the islands we would creep through the dark tunnels in a line, no flashlight, kind

of scared, boys and girls would hold hands for the first time. Before joining the race team, the island trips were by far my most favorite thing to do. Cow Island, Little Chebeague, Basket Island and occasionally Long Island for an ice cream. Once the club moved out of the Widgeons, we sort of lost that part of the program.

What is funny is that we were college coaches' secret recruiting pool. We were not on the map like Newport, San Diego, Annapolis or Miami, but every year we had somebody who was at the top of college coaches' wish lists. Obviously since my generation moved on, the crop of Opti sailors moved in. That de-emphasized the 420 and kids started traveling as part of the Opti National and International elite Teams. For my era, PJYC was the elite team, but that is a difficult culture to maintain.