

Come Sail with Us



*Celebrating 50 Years of
Sailing with the River Rats
in Fair Haven*

February 24, 2011

Dear Friends,

Welcome to *Come Sail With Us*. Tonight we celebrate 50 years of River Rats providing the training, facilities and boats for youngsters and adults to learn sailing on the beautiful Navesink River.

We have a lot to celebrate. Since River Rats' inception as a non-profit educational organization in 1960, almost 5000 youngsters have learned the rules and skills of good seamanship. These youngsters, some representing multiple generations in the same family, have had an opportunity to develop a sense of competence and to experience the discipline that nature imposes while learning to sail.

Volunteerism is at the heart of River Rats. The organization of our classes and the maintenance of the facilities and boats have only been possible because of the willingness of members to volunteer their time and their skills. Volunteers established River Rats and volunteers continue to do the work that makes our training programs possible.

Tonight is also an opportunity to support the River Rats Preservation Fund and ensure that youngsters will learn to sail with the River Rats for another 50 years. Thank you for supporting our mission.

We hope that you have a good time and look forward to seeing you on the water.

Best Regards,

John Briel
Skipper

CAPTAIN'S LOG (THE EARLY YEARS)

July 13, 1955 – Dad's Incorporated considers a sailing club for Fair Haven families.

November 5, 1955 – We hold the first training meeting to inform parents and youngsters about the idea of a sailing club. Following this meeting Walter Isbrandtsen becomes our first Skipper and records, *I organized the first classes for 48 children at my home where we taught them nautical language, small boat handling, knot-tying and about winds, weather and tides.*



Captain Isbrandtsen – Photo courtesy of Randall Gabrielan & Arcadian Publishing

January 24, 1956 – The skipper orders 15 Indian Scout kits (the first of 21) at a cost of \$490 apiece. Work crews of dads and kids begin assembling the boats in Skipper Isbrandtsen's and Philip Carling's garages. *We are boat builders!*

Spring 1956 –Gardner Stout offers his land on Fourth Creek as an anchorage for the new River Rats, rent \$1 per year. Non boat owning families begin the clean up and fencing of this property.

July 1956 – Twenty-one boats launch from the Fourth Creek site. *A new adventure begins.*

September 9, 1956 – We begin a tradition, the end of the sailing season party. We inaugurate two awards, The **Captain Ed Little Award** for a family is named after a life-time Fair Haven resident and skipper of one of the last steamers to sail to Fair Haven. The **Mayor's Award** will be given to the child with the greatest all-around achievement and improvement.

October 1956 – Second season classes begin in the Fair Haven Youth Center for the first time.

Winter 1957 – we add two new boat types to the fleet, five Blue Jays and 16 Porpoises, an 8 foot sailing pram that cost only \$70 for each kit.

Winter 1957/1958 – We add more advanced classes for children and adults. These include the theory of sailing and the techniques, rules and tactics of racing. Women called River Lassies are offered a course so they can be skippers as well as crew.



Late 1950's – Our young crews learning to rig with Dads on land.

Summer 1958 – This season is a full one , the first to extend from May through October. We begin two open races on Sunday afternoons in Spring and Fall. The Summer races include four groups, Novice (14 or younger who might have an adult crew), Junior (19 or younger who must have a junior crew), Ladies (no age limit who might have a male crew) and Open. *By the end of the season most sailors in all fleets had come in first as well as last, had capsized at least once and had had a wonderful time.*

March 2, 1959 – We've lost our home on Fourth Creek and agree at a general meeting to accept an offer made by Walter Isbrandtsen, to use a 110 foot barge that we plan to place in the Navesink River for a launching platform.

July 3, 1959 – The barge drops anchor in the Navesink.

July 12, 1959 – We officially christen the barge, The Pied Piper.

August 1959 – The Executive Committee plans for a new organizational structure that will require each member family to participate actively in the work of one of six committees.

September 30, 1959 – At a general meeting, we decide to incorporate as a separate non-profit organization, the River Rats.

May 18, 1960 – We approve a Constitution and By-Laws and become officially River Rats, Incorporated.

January 21, 1961 – The membership approves purchase of the property on Fourth Creek at the foot of Battin Road for \$9400 and we have a permanent home.

The Captain's Log was excerpted from a history of River Rats written by Margy White (now Hughes) for a 1963 class at Rumson Fair Haven High School. You might be interested to know, she got an A.

WE GET A NAME



One of our members, Lou Illiano, tells us that the name, River Rats, was inspired by the much loved children's book, Wind In The Willows by English author Kenneth Grahame. This conversation from the book says it all.

"Is it so nice as all that?" asked the mole, shyly ...

"Nice? It's the *only thing*," said the Water Rat solemnly as he leaned forward for his stroke. "*Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.*"

"Simply messing... about in boats – or with boats... In or out of 'em it doesn't matter. Nothing seems to matter, that's the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not. Look here! If you've really nothing else on hand this morning, supposing we drop down the river together and have a long day of it?"

You can count on it. River Rats are folks who love to mess about in boats.

RIVER RATS, A UNIQUE FAIR HAVEN ASSET

Reflections of a Graduate

As a 9 year old growing up in Rumson, River Rats was a great, inexpensive way to gain invaluable boating and life skills. I completed two summer youth sailing programs, including local regattas, which in turn fed a love for sailing and boating in general. The youth sailing program helped to instill a respect for the water and an appreciation for sailing and the personal challenge it presented. The program also taught us how to work with others, operate in conflict situations with peers and build social skills and an appreciation for mutual respect. It helped instill the confidence to take on uncomfortable situations and challenges. In terms of sailing, the skills enabled me to go on to compete at regional levels in both the Barnegat Bay and Chesapeake Bay (very successfully I might add) - adding more life experiences to my days growing up here in the two river area.

Thinking about how long River Rats has operated and how many kids participate in the summer sailing programs, the number of 'two river area' kids impacted by the program must be quite large. I heard that nearly 100 kids enrolled this past summer alone. What a productive and enjoyable experience for them - one that doesn't break the bank for mom and dad, and makes sailing accessible to any child. Who can argue that this opportunity is not an asset for our kids? Elsewhere, the concept of a youth sailing program like this is unheard of - simply unavailable in most parts of the state.

I am now a Fair Haven resident and have kids of my own. As an adult, I once again looked to River Rats to help dust off my skills after moving back here and following a 20 year hiatus from sailing. The inexpensive adult class and loaner boat program (for members) had me out on the river countless times this summer. I introduced my wife to sailing for the first time ever. I introduced my eight year old nephew to sailing when he visited.

Reflections of a Graduate

My two year old now knows what a sailboat is and watches daddy leave the dock to go sailing - again - who can argue that is not an asset to Fair Haven and the opportunity we are afforded living alongside the Navesink ?

It is the basic nature of the club and its simple infrastructure that helps keep the costs down for all who get involved - including the youth program fees. The adult training class (open to any adult) and loaner boat fee were easily affordable - even for someone out of work with the current economy. How can you beat that? The value is evident - for those who want it, the opportunity exists to experience sailing in a economical manner with an inclusive group of local people.

Scott Howard (1980's RR graduate)



On the water, racing and relaxing.

From a Local Mom

I can think of no other experience that has added MORE quality of life to our family than being able share in a communal boating experience with friends and neighbors, and watching the our boys' confidence grow by leap and bounds this summer. To hear Michael exclaim, "Mom, we sailed all the way to the osprey nest and back with no help!" was priceless and frankly is a great metaphor for why we love Fair Haven. Our boys have made new friends, learned to work as a team, are appreciating the beauty of Fair Haven's natural resources, learned to respect the water, the property, and enjoying being in Fair Haven...not clamoring to go away. These kids are developing a real sense of pride and love for the natural gifts of our town – can there be any doubt that these experiences will encourage these kids to someday give back to Fair Haven as community members? Quality of life has less to do with what goes on in one's yard, and more to do with the community we live in and the experiences we share. *Katy Frissora, VP Fair Haven First Aid Squad and Mom*



All hands on deck and eyes on the instructor.

And a Former Skipper

In 1971 I arrived in New Jersey from Connecticut knowing no one. I was a sailor and The Fair Haven Sailing Club needed a sailing instructor for the remaining three weeks of the summer program. I volunteered.

On Monday morning I was wondering what on earth I was getting myself into and that I must be crazy. I arrived to find 20 young children ready to climb into their boats to sail, if possible, between two points. They took a long time to do it, but they did it, returning with smiling triumph. As the three weeks went by I could see how they learned to cooperate and get along together to reach the days goals and marveled at their improvement in boat handling skills. This was not a bad lesson for young children to learn.

I enrolled my children in the summer course where they became proficient enough sailors to go on to add to their skills, giving them pleasure that continues to serve them still. The oldest is 52, the second is a Sergeant on your Fair Haven Police Force. He used his water knowledge, learned at River Rats, to start a water Search and Rescue unit for Fair Haven. He also became Skipper of the Club and now his son has been an instructor for the program, like his Dad before him. My youngest lives in the desert but longs for water.



Kyle Heath, a third generation River Rat and instructor.

While these children were in River Rats they had a positive activity to do in their summer holidays, keeping them safe and out of trouble. They learned a new skill. They learned to make decisions and live with the consequences of those decisions. They learned to work with others. They gained in self reliance and self esteem. Multiply that by 100 students and the impact takes on a whole new meaning of raising children to be responsible citizens.

Thousands of children have been through the course since its inception making a positive contribution to their growth and development. It has given employment to at least 120 high school and college age young people, keeping them occupied and teaching them a responsible work ethic.

River Rats is an amazing group of community minded people influencing our futures.

Margaret Heath Pierce, Former Skipper

A Son and RR Graduate Sails For Penn State

We just visited my son Jacob Snyder, a River Rats instructor, at a college sailing race in Toms River. As a freshman at Penn State, he was selected as one of four they send to Regattas out of a big group who are interested in racing on the Team. Couldn't have done it without his excellent experience sailing as a River Rats student grades 4-9 and instructor for the last three years.

Cecil Snyder RD, CDE

And From Another Graduate

I am an expatriated resident of Fair Haven. I haven't lived there for 30 years but I still consider it "where I'm from." If Fair Haven was a country I would still have a passport. It was a great place to be a kid. The dogs roamed around town without leashes. We ran barefoot from Memorial Day to Labor Day. It sounds corny and hard to believe, but that really is the way things were. In the early 1970's, I was a student sailor at the Fair Haven Sailing Club, the River Rats. When I was old enough I could ride my bike to the end

of Battin Road and wrestle my Dad's Sunfish off a rack and wheel it into the water. If there was no wind my friends and I could spend the hours flipping the boat and righting it on the edge of the channel, dodging jellyfish. Later, in the 1980s I was a sailing instructor at River Rats. I return to town with my own family to visit my father. The town never seems to change too much.

Back then, the Battin Road neighbors in the house closest to the parking lot let us use the phone in their garage to call our parents if lightning caused a cancellation of class (ed. note – now RR has its own phone). The owners of the house at the top of the hill had a pool in back that hosted the River Rats swim test, every summer from 1974 (my first year as a student) to 1984 (my last year as an instructor). We looked after each other.

W. Read Scott Martin, Washington



SHORELINE CHANGES: THREAT AND RESPONSE

By the mid-1990's so much shoreline was lost from flooding and silting in the area of the Fair Haven public boat ramp, it became clear that there would not be enough "dry land" to continue our training program and other activities. It was determined that preventing further erosion of the shoreline would require a bulkhead. At the same time, the Borough of Fair Haven needed to stabilize the municipal boat ramp.



Our unprotected shore, before the bulkhead

The Borough and River Rats collaborated and a single project was launched to construct the River Rats bulkhead and the groin adjacent to the boat ramp. The construction of the project, completed in 1997, was managed by the Borough with River Rats reimbursing the Borough fully for its share of the project cost.

As then skipper Richard (Dick) Cheu noted in a brief history of this era, several members provided significant assistance to see this project through to completion. These included Bob Ashenfelder, who provided a critical loan, Bill Heath, who secured support from our neighbors, and Ron Kudile and Dave Muir, who provided practical construction and engineering advice.

The entire membership worked together under Dick's leadership to secure our shore. Remember them the next time you lean on the bulkhead fence and watch for a returning boat or while you enjoy the waterfowl who share our Fourth Creek site.

OUR DOCK

The dock, our main asset and our access to the water, has evolved over time. For many years it was a twice yearly construction project taking all day. Now it is a mostly permanent construction that is easily installed in the spring and removed in the fall, thanks to the time, talents and dedication of two members, Bill Jaeger and the late Dave Muir.



The new dock, groin, boat ramp, and many happy sailors.

Our Skippers – 55 Years of Service

1956-58	Walter Isbrandtsen (Dads Inc.)
1959	Paul White
1960	Bill Rooney (Incorporated as River Rats)
1961	Bob Brockmore
1962	Vinny Lawrence
1963	Bob Howatt
1964	Ed Chinnock
1965-66	Larry Fryer
1967	Fred Brandt
1968	Harrison Rowe
1969	Saul Farmer
1970	Allan Judkins
1971	John Davis
1972	Ruth (Rookie) Chinnock
1973-74	John Lawson
1975-76	Perry Sennewald
1976	Phil Carling
1977	Chuck Spoerr
1978-79	Bob Poole
1980-81	Dick Franks
1982-83	Margaret Heath
1984-85	Ed Pitts
1986-87	Joe Malik
1988-89	Greg Gerber
1990-91	Blake Wattenbarger
1992-93	Dick Plum
1994-95	Bill Heath
1996-97	Dick Cheu
1998-99	Tom Gruenenfelder
2000-01	Ron Kudile
2002-04	Frank Munn
2005-06	Joe Malik
2007-08	Jon Winterbone
2009-10	Jerry Williamson

Thanks to all of our former Skippers, who have kept us afloat through smooth sails and through rough seas. We are grateful for your leadership.