

# MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY *Sailing* CENTER

by Anne Kaiser

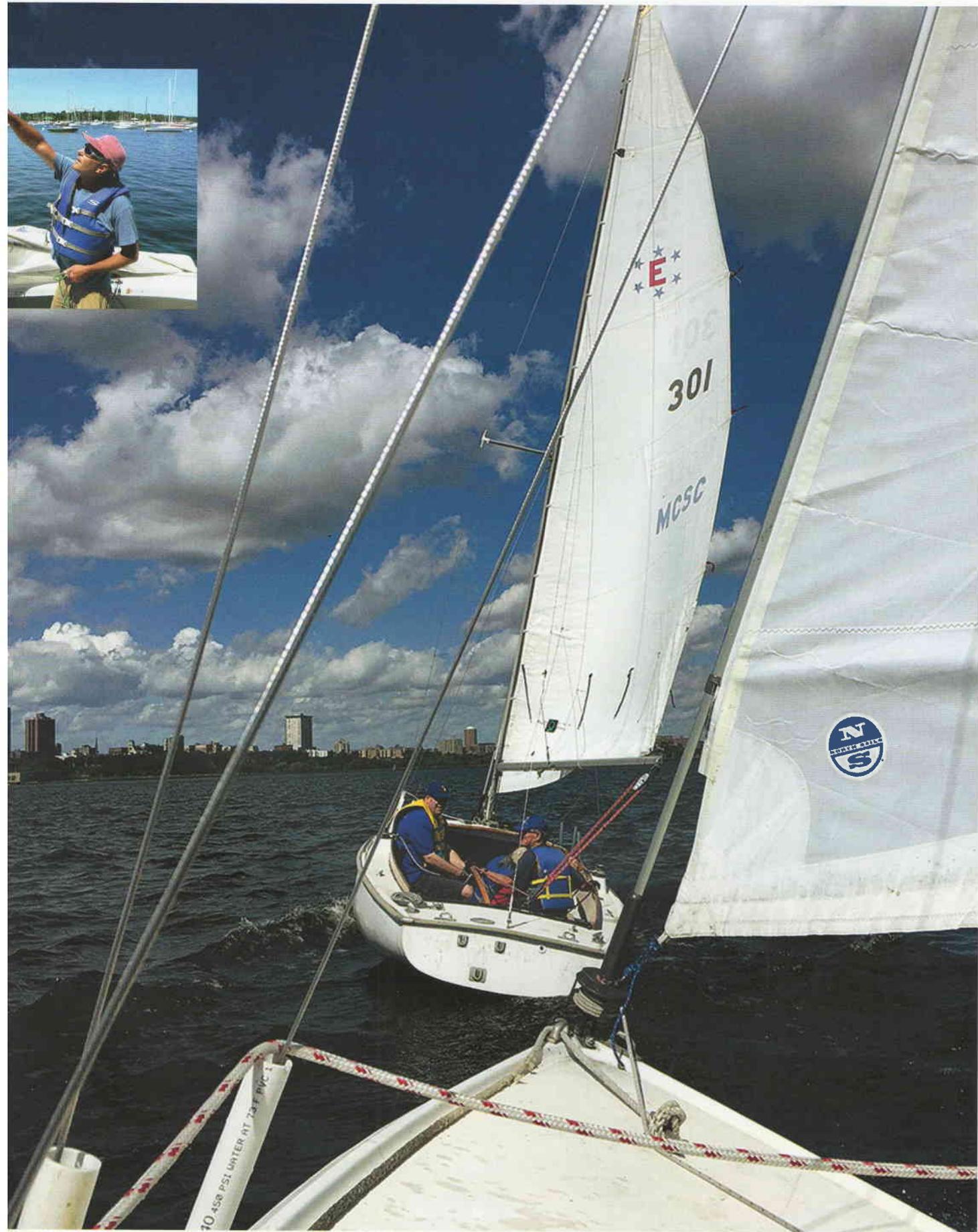
MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY Sailing Center Executive Director Karen Hunt still remembers a sailing trip she took with her family when her children were young. Setting out on Lake Michigan with Racine as their destination, the family quickly needed a break on the hot, windless day. At intervals, they paused for swimming breaks, and finally, after seven hours on the water, decided to motor in to shore. Back on land, her young son thought for a moment before asking how long it usually took to drive to Racine, and then, finally, why the family had chosen the longer water route to their destination. Hunt recalls her response to him, a quote she feels sums up one of the key elements of the experience of sailing: "The journey is the destination."

For over 35 years, the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center has served as a destination and an entryway to a journey of discovery, both for veteran sailors and for those who have never seen Lake Michigan or sailed. Located in Veterans Park at the southern end of McKinley Marina on the shore of Lake Michigan, the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center (MCSC) strives to bridge the gap between these populations, making sailing accessible to all, regardless of financial means or physical ability. Here, sailing represents a chance to develop new skills, nurture a sense of community, and dissolve socioeconomic boundaries. Instructors and staff are committed to the Sailing Center's mission "to promote sailing and make Lake Michigan available to everyone in the Milwaukee community through quality programs."



The Sailing Center holds 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, and strives to provide sailing opportunities, classes, and events to the general public, members, and, through partnerships with area schools and nonprofit groups, at-risk and economically challenged young people and those with disabilities.

Through its outreach programs, MCSC partners with organizations such as the Ys, Teen Approach, Pearls for Teen Girls, and Boys & Girls Clubs to bring sailing experiences to at-risk urban teens. MCSC also partners with MAST (Milwaukee Area Sailing Teens) to offer similar opportunities to disadvantaged children and youth. These young people may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience sailing; some have never spent time on or near Lake Michigan. Sailing experiences offer more than just an understanding of how sailboats work. For these young people, the accompanying life lessons of team work, perseverance, and an increase in confidence, self-esteem, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills often propel them in a new life direction. In addition, participants gain a greater appreciation for and understanding of Lake Michigan and its value to all Milwaukee residents.



## SAILING CENTER

The Milwaukee Community Sailing Center also works with Milwaukee County's Office for Persons with Disabilities to offer sailing experiences to children and adults with disabilities. In 2006, MCSC was one of just two Wisconsin-based organizations to receive a Quality of Life Grant from the Christopher Reeve Foundation. This allowed the Sailing Center to make necessary upgrades to install an ADA accessible floating dock with hydraulic

lifts. This dock allows wheelchair-bound individuals to safely enter and exit sailboats.

MCSC is also committed to share sailing experiences with schools. Starting in 2014, the Sailing Center started a STEM program, "STEMward: Sailing Into Middle School," working with Trowbridge Street School, Brown Deer Middle School and Ozaukee Middle School students and teachers. Teachers attend informative inservice sessions at MCSC, and then MCSC sends instructors to the schools to teach four

modules. Students learn about the concepts of aerodynamics, displacement, buoyancy, and geometry through the lens of sailing and related experiences. The STEMward sessions wrap up with students each building their own model sailboats and enjoying a mock regatta, each trying to best their own individual racing speed.

Teachers, students, and administrators rave about the STEMward program. Trowbridge Street School eighth grader Carlos wrote to MCSC in thanks: "...I've learned so much. I never knew anything about boats. As a matter of fact I was never on a boat, I was learning the whole time!" Trowbridge Street School Principal Tom Matthews expressed a similar sentiment: "This has been a very engaging experience, one that the students talk about daily. Many of them would not have had this opportunity to experience the lake front and sailing without the center's generous donations..."

Dan Marien, Brown Deer Middle School Tech Education Teacher (Project Lead the Way) summarized the benefits of bringing together the sciences and their real-world applications: "Anytime we can take school work and let the students see it working in a real-world application such as sailing—the educational value is priceless."

The STEMward program truly makes both science and sailing come alive for student participants. Following the completion of one year's STEMward program, 84% of Brown Deer Middle School eighth graders surveyed about their experience stated that they "were able to apply science, technology, engineering and math to real world sailing events and careers." 72% of students surveyed indicated that they "were interested in having a career in science, technology, or engineering after doing STEMward."

A volunteer-driven organization, the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center received 3,853 hours of service in 2016 from friends and members. Volunteers are passionate about their experiences with MCSC, as one commented on the MCSC page on the Great Nonprofits website: "The MCSC is a fantastic organization, expertly

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guided by a highly motivated core team, and supported by a large and dedicated group of volunteers... I... started to volunteer in 2014, and find it a highly rewarding experience.

The MCSC is a top-notch organization and I personally plan on supporting their mission for many years to come."

Karen Hunt brings a lifetime of sailing experience and a background in work in the nonprofit sector to her role as the Sailing Center's Executive Director. She is passionate about the Center's mission as well as the experience of sailing and the opportunities and life skills it brings to both new and seasoned sailors. "It's one of the best team

building experiences you can take," Hunt explained, describing the teamwork necessary to operate a sailboat. Although solo sailing is possible, most sailboats require a team of people, with at least one at the sails and one to steer. Smaller boats like the Soling generally have a three-person crew, while larger high-performance boats like the Promo, Sociable, or Defiance often carry crews of 12.

Many people underestimate the power of Lake Michigan, but Hunt notes, "All of the Great Lakes should be revered." In cases when sailors have fallen into the water, the extreme cold of Lake Michigan gives people a very short window of time to swim to safety to avoid dangerous hypothermia. In addition, storms can blow up quickly, creating very

choppy water. MCSC follows strict protocol to keep its sailors safe. As Hunt states, "We have safety as a primary function."

The Milwaukee Community Sailing Center offers a variety of courses to give youth and adults the chance to learn the skills and nomenclature necessary to successfully operate a sailboat. MCSC's nationally recognized program Prams in the Park offers an introduction to water safety and basic sailing skills to children ages eight to eleven in the quieter waters of the Discovery World Lagoon. Young people who wish to study or participate in sailing courses must first pass a swim test, often at a local Y, to demonstrate ability to move comfortably through the water using any stroke for 75 yards. Hunt noted that this

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## ■ SAILING CENTER

has been one of MCSC's greatest challenges in their goal of reaching a larger population of potential young sailors—not all can swim or are comfortable navigating safely in the water.

The Sailing Center offers basic, intermediate, and advanced instruction to adults, with opportunities for individuals to earn a wind rating following completion of the course.

Membership at the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center is offered for individual adults, couples residing at the same address, senior citizens, youth (ages 12-17), associates (those who wish to have access but no sailing), and adaptive (individuals with disabilities). Nonmembers who enroll in a shorter two-day introductory sampler class and then decide to join the MCSC may apply the fee from that course toward the purchase of their membership. Members who have earned a wind rating may then take one of the MCSC sailboats out onto Lake Michigan free

of charge during the Center's Open Sailing hours, wind and weather permitting.

Members also enjoy racing at the MCSC. For members with or without racing experience enrolled in the Enrichment Program, Sunday races allow sailors to learn more about racing using MCSC boats. U.S. Sailing Rules are always followed, and skippers must have special certification to ensure the participating sailors understand the rules of racing and adhere to strict safety protocol.

The Sailing Center offers social events and opportunities to share the beauty of Lake Michigan and the Milwaukee skyline. MCSC rents out the second floor of its administration building, an up-to-date 2010 facility boasting a geothermal heating and cooling system and a domed roof funneling rainwater to a rain garden. The outdoor grounds are available for rental for tented events as well; both indoors and out, weddings and corporate events are made richer by the exquisite changing landscape of Lake Michigan. Events may be enhanced by a special occasion sailboat ride

led by a MCSC instructor and tailored to the needs of the individual or group.

As this sailing season opens, individuals with diverse life backgrounds and stories will come together to celebrate sailing, science, nature, and life at the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center. For some, Lake Michigan's waters have beckoned for a lifetime. For others, this June will mark the start of an adventure of discovery, new skills, and friendships cultivated through sailing classes, races, and social events at the Sailing Center. The magic and mystery of gliding over water holds a universal appeal; as Karen Hunt explains, "It's just you and nature—but in sailing, it's really nature that's providing the propulsion—it's kind of like flying on water." This natural majesty, combined with the resources, expertise, and dedication of staff and volunteers will continue to draw diverse populations to the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center. There, sailboats become more than a means to a destination; they open pathways to entire life journeys. ■

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