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Atlantic Boating News

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SAILORS ON WHEELS

The Nova Scotia Yachting Association Mobile Sailing School is bringing sailing lessons to a rural community near you

By SUZANNE RENT

This summer the Nova Scotia Yachting Association Mobile Sailing School got the wind in its sails – or at least traction under its wheels – and hit the road to bring sailing to kids in rural communities around the province. A similar program was offered at least 10 years ago, but was closed because of a lack of financing. This program is being funded by the Support4Sport program, which was introduced by the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation in 2006, Sport Nova Scotia, and the Department of Health Promotion & Protection.

“It’s been really successful and the kids love it” says Jeff Stanley, junior sailing director at Wallace MacAskill Yacht Club in St. Peter’s, Cape Breton and who is coordinating the program this summer. “Last year in our junior sailing program we had six to seven participants. This year, 35 new sailors were taught in this program.

The program has three goals: First, to introduce sailing and

water safety to a large number of kids each summer; secondly to certify those young sailors in the Canadian Yachting Association’s Learn to Sail levels, Wet Feet, White Sail 1-3; and finally to encourage the communities they visit to start sailing programs of their own. Kids participate in classes from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for up to one week. Stanley says many of the parents initially sign their kids up for just two days, but quickly allow their kids to finish out the week.

“After that they’re hooked,” Stanley says.

One of the kids who was hooked was 15-year-old Michael Cunningham. He lives in Dartmouth but spends the summer at his grandparents’ cottage in Irish Cove, about a half an hour from the Wallace MacAskill Yacht Club in St. Peter’s, Cape Breton. He had taken lessons at the club in 2008, but once he found out about the Mobile Sailing School, he was more than eager to sign up.

"We saw the trailer and the new boats and Michael was over the moon," says Michael's mom, Ruth. "He's become enamoured with sailing. He thinks about it all the time.

The trailer seems to be catching people's attention, just like it did for Michael Cunningham, and is proving to be the best form of advertising. It's 20 feet in length and can carry up six fully equipped Optimist Dinghies, an ACCESS Dinghy, a coach boat and motor, as well as all the necessary safety gear. And it's decorated with the program name and logo.

This past summer, the program was offered in a number of communities around Cape Breton, including St. Peter's, Dundee, Arichat and Mabou. Frank Denis, Executive Director of the NSYA, says they hope to expand the program to more communities next year. A few communities, including Guysborough, Pictou and Barrachois Harbour, have already expressed an interest in having the program come to their town. And Denis says they hope to have an ACCESS dinghy to make next year's program more accessible to those kids with disabilities. They may also add some double-handed ocean kayaks to bring some variety to the boating skills. This fall the NSYA hopes the program will be offered at several lakes around the Halifax Regional Municipality for evening and weekend classes.

During their time with the program, the kids learn about sailing, of course, but they learn other skills, too. Ruth Cunningham says she noticed that Michael learned about more than sailing.

"It gives him a high level of confidence, independence and life goals."

Frank Denis says another goal of the program is to encourage kids to become sailing instructors, which are in short supply



THE TRAILER HOLDS SIX FULLY EQUIPPED OPTIMIST DINGHIES, AN ACCESS DINGHY, A COACH BOAT & MOTOR AND SAFETY GEAR. PHOTO BY: NSYA.

around the province. It seems that they've got one potential instructor in the making. Michael spent the rest of the summer with the Mobile Sailing School's instructors, Justin and Gioia Stanley, Jeff Stanley's son and daughter, travelling around Cape Breton with the school. He's working toward achieving the necessary training to become an instructor, and he's even thinking long term. His mom says he's talking about studying naval architecture in

university and eventually sailing the British Virgin Islands. She doesn't doubt his passion for the sport.

"Check in with us in five years and I'm sure Michael will be on the water in a sailboat somewhere."

For more information on the NSYA Mobile Sailing School, go to www.nsyasailing.ca or contact the NSYA at 902-425-5450.

NSYA Mobile Sailing School

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