

# Community Boating Center

## Our Boats, Your Bay

John O'Flaherty

Rhode Island's greatest environmental resource is Narragansett Bay. For generations it has been regarded as one of the best boating grounds in the world, attracting sailors and outdoor enthusiasts from around the globe. Unfortunately, most Rhode Islanders, especially urban residents of average means, have only been able to enjoy the bay from ashore. The Community Boating Center (CBC) in Providence is changing all that. It makes good sense for the capital of the Ocean State to have a program that makes sailing and boating accessible and affordable to all while encouraging environmentally appropriate use of the upper bay. It makes good sense for the CBC to continue Rhode Island's rich seafaring tradition by helping restore Providence's waterfront to the center of activity it once was. It makes great sense to utilize an engaging medium like boating to help create environmentalists with a vested interest in protecting the long-term health of the planet.

Each year, CBC serves over 200 adults and 800 youth, nearly half of whom are at-risk for a variety of poor outcomes. Our outreach program provides many of these at-risk youth with introductory sailing experiences, while our Sailorships and educational institution partnerships provide longer-term exposure to sailing and boating. Over 80% of the students from schools who participate in CBC programs are minorities — 31.5% are African American, 8% are Asian, 43.5% are Latino, 1% are Native American, and 17.5% are White.

CBC is the only Rhode Island program north of Newport that offers the general public both lessons and access to boats for recreational sailing and maritime initiatives. Members can use boats on evenings and weekends for a very affordable seasonal fee. CBC maritime programs at India Point also add to the quality of life and help advance Providence's image as an environmentally active city.

CBC's hands-on approach puts people in touch with pressing issues affecting their connection to the environment. Minimizing electronic media "disconnect", discouraging suburban "sprawl" and expanding links to existing and planned greenways are all important factors in the long-term success of facilitating a positive environmental impact.

We connect the city and the sea.

**Youth shuffle in our door wearing street clothes, high-tops and clutching video games. They stride out wearing recycled fleece, sandals and embracing the environment.**

Providence and CBC are uniquely positioned to link urban residents to the environment. CBC increases environmental awareness by preserving and promoting what is most unique to the capital of the Ocean State—connection to waterfront resources. Sailing is a popular green segment in recreational boating. The simplicity and acceptance of sailing as an environmentally sustainable sport for anyone makes it an important medium to attract urban residents to get outside. We constantly strive to complement the success of our sailing initiatives with new programs that offer an active alternative to television, video, and other static activities detrimentally impacting a healthy connection to the environment.

### One With the Wind

In just over 17 years, CBC has put thousands of people on the water — most of whom with no previous connection to the bay. We offer hands-on opportunities to increase self-esteem through the mastery of challenging skills. By engaging in unique and extraordinary experiences, we offer people opportunities to broaden their horizons. Through standards-based marine curriculum and environmentally responsible use of Rhode Island's greatest natural resource — Narragansett Bay — we provide youth and adults with the opportunity to enhance their environmental awareness.



Instructors take students out on the water for an unparalleled, hands-on experience. *Photo: Community Boating Center.*

For youth and adults who enjoy the outdoors—wind in their face and the sound of moving water—CBC is their link to the marine environment. Sailing and maritime instruction is secondary to the real learning that takes place on the water. The look on a student's face who has just "captained" a boat for the first time describes the essence of the experience. Our unique strength lies in hands-on, experiential learning. Our maritime programs are much more than a field trip or limited day-tour experience. Our dynamic program fully immerses students in their environment and fosters a connection to Narragansett Bay that they can enjoy for a lifetime.

Collaboration among people of different races, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds is essential in our efforts to solve some of the most pressing social problems of today. Through participation in CBC programs, youth and adults of diverse backgrounds work together — developing trust, understanding, and respect for the environment and one another.

## Youth Outreach, Sailorships, and Affordable Access

CBC outreach programs provide single session sailing adventures to at-risk youth from Rhode Island organizations. In addition to providing these young people with the opportunity to expand their range of experiences, this exciting model serves as a "feeder" program to recruit youth with an interest in attending our multi-day sailing and boating programs on scholarship.

Our highly successful summer "Sailorship" program provides needed scholarships for our two-week, full day KidSail or TeenSail summer camp sessions. Sailorships are awarded according to demonstrated need for financial assistance. There are few activities that teach life lessons about the environment, cause and effect, problem solving, science and technology, and teamwork the way sailing does.



The game faces are on during CBC's annual Renaissance Regatta corporate fundraiser. *Photo: Community Boating Center.*



CBC's engaging programs foster confidence and leadership skills. *Photo: Community Boating Center.*

There is no greater recreational opportunity for the capital of the Ocean State than boating. Upon completing an instructional class or checkout test, adults can take their families sailing evenings and weekends all season long, maximizing public usage of waterfront resources.

## Our Accomplishments

Since opening in India Point Park in June 1994, CBC has created a dynamic program linking thousands of people to the inherently eco-friendly activity of sailing and the marine environment. Our long-term lease of waterfront property, new docks and boathouse, and fleet of over 60 boats was facilitated primarily through volunteers who donated time, materials and private funding. CBC's founding is a true, grass-roots success story. The collaborative effort of a group of dedicated individuals has transitioned CBC from a small start-up into an integral component of Providence's waterfront revival.

Youth shuffle in our door wearing street clothes, high-tops and clutching video games. They stride out wearing recycled fleece, sandals and embracing the environment. There is no better way to do a little good for the environment than by creating little environmentalists. Our popular sailing programs use wind-power to elicit off-the-grid fun. Linked to school-based curriculum, our award winning programs like "WaterWorld" and "TreasureTracker" combine the allure of GPS (Global Positioning System) treasure hunts with the engaging nature of the marine environment. WaterWorld teaches math and science lessons — like 70% of the globe is covered with water — and encourages youth to "own" their piece of the planet. Students learn to trace the route their relatives sailed to reach the US, use satellites to find hidden treasure, and steer a boat on the bay.

TreasureTracker capitalizes on rich maritime history and underutilized Providence waterfront resources. CBC has developed "treasure trails" of historic landmarks and points of interest connecting Narragansett Bay and WaterPlace Park.

This unique effort challenges and empowers youth who may not immediately connect to boating to embrace their interest and aptitude for technology, gain an appreciation for Rhode Island's maritime heritage, and absorb underlying lessons in environmental awareness.

CBC continues to create new opportunities to serve our growing constituency. We've recently added three 22' keelboats, and continue to build our small boat fleet including twelve new 14' Hunter 140 sailboats. Grants from corporations, foundations, and individual donors continue to allow CBC to further grow our popular learn-to-sail and maritime programs with safe, stable, and fun boat designs providing increased comfort in introducing new boaters to the bay.

## Our Impact

CBC's offers a warm welcome to Narragansett Bay for environmental learning and outdoor recreation for residents who would otherwise not have access to the water. Sailing is the epitome of green, low-impact recreation and can be enjoyed by a diverse population. CBC attracts people from diverse backgrounds to enjoy learning and recreating together — impacting our communities in a strong and lasting way. Through sailing, we look forward to providing an expanded outlet to the environment that allows children and adults to gain a first-hand appreciation for the natural resources in their community.

Millions of dollars have been spent to revitalize WaterPlace Park and surrounding areas. Great opportunities exist to leverage the value of this infrastructure to improve environmental awareness of boating enthusiasts, pedestrians, and cyclists in establishing nodes of activity that connect boat channels, walking trails, as well as bike paths. CBC is a perfect geographical and cultural link to maximize public use of these unique environmental resources. Expanding sailing and boating, particularly along water bodies at India Point, will ensure that Providence's existing and planned greenways will properly connect active recreation facilities with statewide resources that serve a maximum number of

users of all backgrounds in an environmentally friendly, equitable, and efficient manner.

Community Boating Center is much more than a great idea. CBC is a proven, sustainable model that uniquely positions Providence as an innovative leader in high-quality waterfront programs. CBC takes great pride in the varied accomplishments and stewardship of India Point Park through a public/private partnership with the City of Providence. CBC's long-term lease with the Providence Parks and Recreation Department and provision of shared boating resources is a highly efficient model in protecting natural and cultural resources on the Providence waterfront. Seeing an impressive array of sails on the water is visual proof that Providence and CBC are committed to engaging people with their environment.

CBC attributes much of its success to an important relationship with the residents surrounding India Point in their perceived ownership of CBC as a true "community" boating center. CBC's ability to significantly grow through a period of I-95 highway construction is a testament to its resolve in embracing the help of the community in ensuring success. With major roadway changes and new pathways to the water complete and others on the near horizon, we look forward to further community building opportunities to support our success and our future growth.

Revitalization of open space, particularly waterfront, is also a powerful contributor to the regional vision for economic development and job growth in marketing Providence and surrounding areas as a livable city with unique site views, public access, continuous greenways, and other attractive waterfront attributes and resources accessible to all. CBC and its maritime initiatives are key links to connecting further downtown, waterfront, and neighboring East Providence expansion plans.

Ultimately, our impact will be measured by an active, visual display of sails trimmed by youth and adult sailors-turned environmentalists exploring and owning the waterways of downtown Providence and beyond.

*~John O'Flaherty is executive director of the Community Boating Center.*



As the weather warms up you can expect to see more sailboats peppering Narragansett Bay. Photo: Community Boating Center.

## How You Can Help

CBC is a 501(c)3 charitable organization. Sponsors are needed and all donations are welcome to support our programs. In particular, our "Renaissance Regatta" is CBC's primary fund-raising initiative raising over \$530,000 for youth outreach and program initiatives since its inception in 1999. Sponsors provide teams to sail in a series of small boat relays, slaloms, and team building games that emphasize fun. After the races, CBC youth sailors provide free sailboat rides, and CBC hosts a post-regatta cocktail reception and silent auction. This year's regatta is scheduled for July 21, 2011 with a fundraising target of \$60,000.

Contact John O'Flaherty at (401) 454-7245 or visit [communityboating.com](http://communityboating.com) for full details.