

A fair breeze and a lot of fun

Gilford:

By HARRISON HAAS

Monday, June 28, 2010

For the past 22 years, youths have been coming from around the world to learn the art of sailing right here in the Lakes Region, beginning on small dinghies and working their way to boats for the more experienced.

Today marks the opening day for the Lake Winnepesaukee Sailing Association's youth sailing program, an eight-week educational course for youths, teenagers and now adults.

Last year, there was a 30 percent increase in enrollment from the previous year, which led to the association keeping its entire staff and expanding the program to other age groups.

For years, the program has been opened for youth sailors between the ages of eight and 16. This summer, the LWSA has added two new programs, including a six- and seven-year-old half-day program, along with a beginner adult program.

LWSA Youth Director Anthony Sperazzo said they saw a huge amount of interested from the parents since they saw their child was having so much fun. "We had a lot of adults show interest in the program," said Sperazzo.



Lake Winnepesaukee Sailing Association sailing instructor Carson Quigley, left, helps a camper set the sail on a 420 as the camp opens for the summer. (DARYL CARLSON/CITIZEN PHOTO)



"For the younger kids, we want to get them acclimated to the water a lot sooner and let them do something on their own."

Eight adults have signed up, along with 12 six- and seven-year-olds.

In the early courses, students are introduced to sailing and safety in and around sailboats, with beginner sailors learning to rig, sail and steer the boat. The program consists of both dry land training, which takes place in a classroom at Fay's Boatyard, and hands-on training at the docks and on the lake.

Now in his second year with the program, Sperazzo said the instructors are the reason why it had been so successful and why he is anticipating another busy season.

"They are the reason why this program has grown," said Sperazzo. "This is the second year with the same crew of instructors."

Students entering the program are coming in from all over the United States, along with a few international students.

"If we keep getting the numbers we are getting, we hope to get more boats next year," he said.

Head instructor for the program is James Unsworth who sailed at Roger Williams University for four years. This will be his second year with the program, too, and he enjoys every minute of it.

"It's really fun to be a part of a program that's developing so quickly and making such big strides," said Unsworth. "We look forward to doing more so by expanding it and making the program into a world-class operation here."

Unsworth is originally from northern Vermont and grew up sailing on Lake Champlain. He has been spending the past few summers here in the Lakes Region but sailing has been in his blood since he was able to walk.

"We're looking forward to getting as many people as we can in the water this summer," said Unsworth.

The program's fleet consists of 15 optimist dinghies and six 420 sailboats, both of which are competitive, racing-class boats. Unsworth said the optimist boats are among the most popular racing sailboats in the world.

"The smaller boat prepares them for the large boats," said Unsworth. "They learn the fundamentals and sailing principles. It's a complete progression; they start small with the optimist then move on to bigger and better things."

One thing about sailing that Unsworth pointed out was that people can do it starting really young and can continue to do throughout their lives.

Al Posnack, head of the LWSA, said many of the students have grown up through the program, with some having been in for nine years.

"It's about a lot more than just sailing boats; it's a tremendous confidence-builder," said Posnack. "You take a kid who is eight-years-old, you put him in a boat by himself, tell him a few things and next thing he's off on his own."

He said the program helps build teamwork, sportsmanship and independence. He said the amount of interest in sailing has grown significantly in the past few years since it is available for many more people.

One way to help youth sailors get involved has been through scholarships that are available through the program.

For more information about the Lake Winnepesaukee Sailing Association, sailing programs and scholarship programs, visit www.lwsa.org.