

Waypoints

Sail America talks to Lee Tawney, Executive Director of the National Sailing Center and Hall of Fame.

“Sailing has charted a course through America’s heart and history....” —Walter Cronkite, Former Honorary Chair, National Sailing Center and Hall of Fame
Founded in 2005, the National Sailing Center and Hall of Fame works on the principle of preserving America’s sailing legacy and engaging sailing’s next generation. Though there is no physical facility yet, in 2011, the NSCHOF inducted such famous sailors and designers as Dennis Conner, Ted Turner, Rod Stephens, and Ted Hood. But, the NSCHOF stands for more than just honoring the past. Much of the nonprofit’s time centers around getting kids involved in sailing, thereby capturing a younger audience and, in part, ensuring a future for the industry.

Sail America caught up with Lee Tawney about the National Sailing Hall of Fame:

The National Sailing Hall of Fame inductees were compared to a fantasy football team in *Sailing* magazine. How does a Hall of Fame for sailors translate to getting young people involved in sailing?

It’s an aspiration for young people to be a Hall of Famer. Look at any sport; they have a Hall of Fame. After we held our first Inductee Ceremony, Google saw 3500 hits on ‘sailing hall of famer.’ In sports, people always talk about future Hall of Famers. Now, sailing can say that too.

These inductees will eventually be honored within a \$19.5 million facility in Annapolis. What is the status with the new building plans?

We started this project in 2008. We wanted to put it all into a building on the waterfront adjacent to the US Naval Academy and Annapolis City Dock to connect with people and make sailing both educational and interesting. The building will include a gallery that honors hall of famers and showcases the science and spirit of sailing. It will also include multimedia and interactive installations, such as indoor virtual regatta boats, and a sailing library. We’re raising capital; we still have a ways to go. But, we’re seeing a lot of interest and continue to raise money from private sources.

You also have a Marine and Maritime Career Fair that attracted such marine industry organizations as American Boat & Yacht Council, the Landing School, the International Yacht & Restoration School, and BoatU.S. What’s the level of interest and what does this mean?

The first year we tried it, we were startled by the number of kids showing up with their parents. We thought, 'we're on to something, we have to keep this going.' The notion that they showed up, they came with their parents, demonstrated there's a market for this type of thing. It can be replicated around the country. Many of the groups at the fair are recruiting kids to the program; there's no reason other regions can't do something like this.

Over 2,000 high school students have gotten involved in your Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) program. How does this program help you connect with young sailors?

When students can interact with subject matter, it makes learning enjoyable and brings lessons to life. Based on the premise that students would find math and science more interesting and less abstract if concepts were tied to practical applications of sailing, the NSHOF is developing an educational program that can be replicated in schools, community sailing programs, and junior sailing organizations nationwide. This works on the principle of Performance Based Learning (PBL). We're extending it to math and science teachers as well—developing a group of local math and science teachers who can sail and effectively assist with the development of curricular ideas and best practices for teaching through sailing. The Anne Arundel County Public Schools [Maryland], where we have practiced these principles, have indicated in writing that the partnership with the NSHOF far exceeded their greatest expectations.

What does this mean for your recent partnership with Discovery Education?

Discovery Education, the largest provider of curriculum materials, came to us. They are present in 75% of schools, the number one provider of K-12 broadband digitally streamed educational content in US schools. Once we have materials, they are the vehicles to get our materials into the hands of teachers around the country. They provide an opportunity for us to create a national platform.

Along the lines of creating a national platform, the NSCHOF did establish a National Consortium in 2010 to further the advancement of teaching math and science through sailing. Where does that stand?

The National Consortium of sailing and educational organizations shares curriculum and best practices in order to promote similar programs throughout the country. To date, 93 organizations are involved and we're developing pilot programs to test our curricula.

You recently mentioned that you have provided free sailing to nearly 2,000 people, 75% of whom had never sailed before. And, you don't have a fleet of boats. How did you achieve that?

We provide free sailing through boats donated from other people. A great example of that are the *Bull* and *Bear* sandbaggers we use for a FreeSail program. We offer sailing to the community, along with our STEM program, in the summer. People donate boats for us to

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use. Look at any marina in the country. Boats are sitting in the marinas. If we could get people on a national level to take one day...one day...to get a kid on a boat to show them what sailing is all about, it would make a real difference. I have a quick sidebar: A friend's son is captain of the sailing team at Villanova University and they had an activity sign-up sheet. One hundred and thirty people signed up, only 20 of them had sailed before. Corinthian Yacht Club in Philadelphia provided space for boats from Villanova, University of Pennsylvania, Drexel. That's 110 new sailors on the water. What could happen if every yacht club offered space? In the end, we have to get butts on boats.

To learn more about the National Sailing Center and Hall of Fame, visit nshof.org

