

Boat ahoy!

By Kathy Hanson
Contributing Writer

"I really don't know why it is that all of us are so committed to the sea, except I think it's because in addition to the fact that the sea changes, and the light changes, and ships change, it's because we all came from the sea. And it is an interesting biological fact that all of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea - whether it is to sail or to watch it - we are going back from whence we came.

[Remarks at the Dinner for the America's Cup Crews, September 14 1962]"

— John F. Kennedy



There are few more compelling summer sights than watching a sailboat, colorful sails unfurled, catch the wind and cut cleanly through the water.

Today we would call it a sport, an adventure, a hobby or passion, but sailing—as far back as the Middle Ages—was instrumental in moving civilization along, whether it was for trade, transport, fishing or fighting a war.

No one knows the beginnings of the maritime history of Lac Courte Oreilles, but sailing continues as a tradition today on her waters, thanks to the efforts of a few good men and women.

Organized sailboat racing on Lac Courte Oreilles began in 1969, according to Tom Austin Sr. who recounts the history of "The LCO Sailing Club" on COLA's website.

"The first phase started during the early summer of 1969, when a group of lake sailors got together at the Austin cabin to fabricate three large sailing buoys," Austin writes.

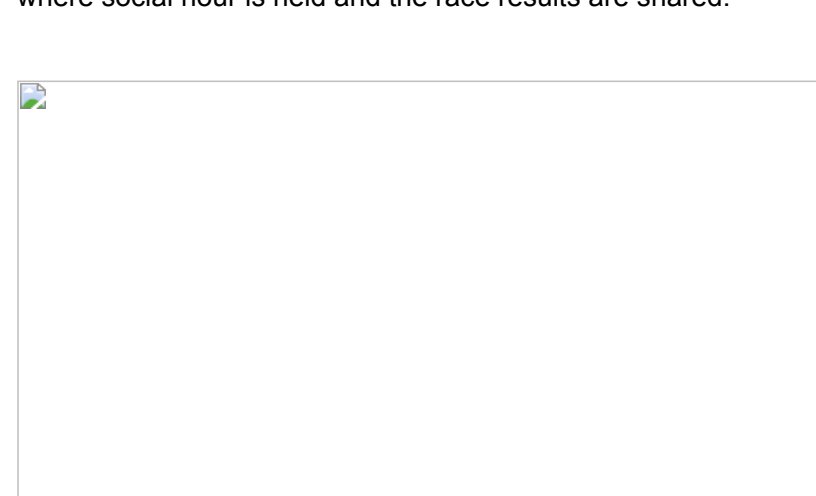
He then explains how six-inch sheets of RV Styrofoam insulation board were cut into four-foot squares, glued together to make a 4' by 4' cube through which an electrical conduit was run and a flag attached to one end, an anchor to the other.

The buoys were used for the first free July 4th invitational sailboat regatta on Lac Courte Oreilles with charter members that included Pat Gannon, David Bradley, Clark Olson, John Jenny, Dick Jones and Commodore Tom Austin himself.

Austin said the success and interest in that sole event, along with the friendship and esprit de corps of a small group of skippers, was the catalyst for the formation of the Courte Oreilles Sailing Club.

Today the Courte Oreilles Sailing Club (COSC) is an organized non-profit organization with the sole purpose of promoting sailing activities—open to anyone, resident or nonresident.

Tom Burgess, who began sailing Lac Courte Oreilles at age six on a Snipe, is a regular in the Saturday afternoon races that generally begin at 1:30 p.m., normally from Chicago Bay over to Bruce Lillyblad's cabin on the south shore of Crystal Beach where social hour is held and the race results are shared.



Burgess said they run two races each Saturday; in ideal winds they each run about 35 minutes long. He races with an 18-foot Hunter, a sailboat he refers to as a "Day Sailor." Burgess has owned three different Hunters and favors them because of their stability and the total sail area (the jib and main sails combined). "It has never tipped over," he said.

"As a general rule, sailboat races are cancelled when wind exceeds 20 mph or when the wind diminishes to less than five," Burgess said, adding that if a thunderstorm warning has been issued or a storm appears imminent, they either postpone the races for an hour or two or cancel.

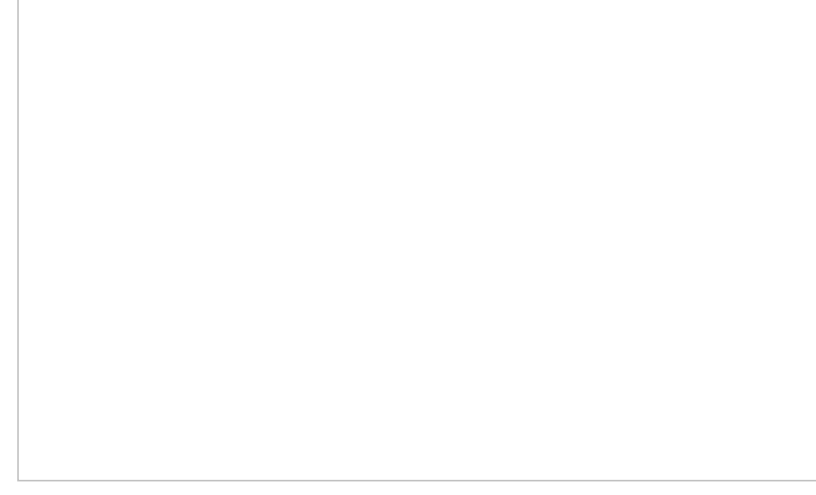
Bruce Lillyblad is also an avowed veteran sailor who first sailed in 1954 as crew on an E-boat on Spring Lake in Michigan. He's been sailing ever since, starting with a 12-foot Butterfly sailboat. Today he owns eight Butterfly sailboats and one 16-foot MC Scow.

Lillyblad doesn't mince words when asked what he likes most about sailing. "I like the competition; who can beat who," he said, plain and simple. His MC is a very competitive boat—fast, comfortable and generally it can be sailed by one person, he explained.

In 1992 Lillyblad sailed across the Atlantic in a 54-foot Irwin sailboat in the 500 Year Christopher Columbus Commemorative Race. There were six crew and it took them 20 days, Lillyblad said.

It's not all smooth sailing on Lac Courte Oreilles, however. Lillyblad recalls the Storm of '77, the Fourth of July weekend. Fortunately, he wasn't on his boat when the storm hit but his shorestation ended up on his neighbor's dock.

In 2006 Burgess and Lillyblad, along with COSC sailors Will Ferris and Bruce's son Mike, sailed a 38-foot Beneteau in the Virgin Islands for five days, eating fresh lobster every night for dinner.



Another COSC sailor is Dick Land, today's Commodore who operates the rescue boat during races.

Land first learned to sail while at UW-Madison. Years later, while boating on Lac Courte Oreilles, he helped people who had capsized. And that is how he came to join the club which he said attracts sailors because of the organized competition, including the race committee, boat operations of the course and the race results—and knowing there is a rescue boat present for their safety.

Burgess said there are 23 active members in the sailing club and one associate member. Last season they had seven full race days. The 2015 season results were:

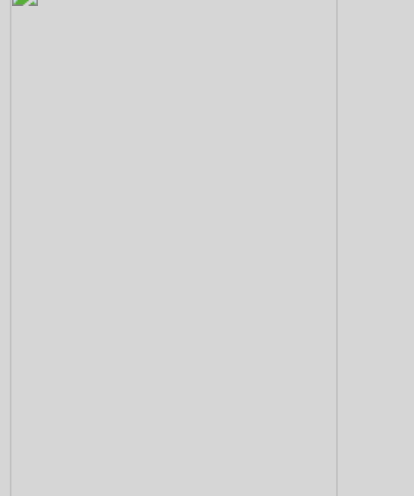
1. Tom Austin Jr.
2. Mike Lillyblad
3. Will Ferris
4. Deb Pomroy
5. Mike Stoll

Like the lake itself, the Courte Oreilles Sailing Club has a long and storied history with generations repeating themselves as they sail the waters year after year.

"I like the fact that you don't depend on anything else but yourself and the wind," Burgess said.

COSC hopes to increase its skipper membership in the 2016 season. For more information visit COSC-wi.org

Kathy Hanson is a free-lance reporter for the Sawyer County Gazette, the Sawyer County Field Editor for Our Wisconsin magazine, and Copy Editor for the Bayfield County Journal. She has also served as Staff Reporter, Business Feature Writer, Columnist, and Copy Editor for the Sawyer County Record.



COLA Annual Meeting
Saturday, June 25, 2016
8:30 - 11:00 am
St. Francis Solanis
Mission Church

If you have friends or family on nearby lakes who would enjoy Short Ears Long Tales, [let us know](#).

We'd like to spread the news of COLA's good people and good works throughout the upper Couderay River watershed.

NOTICES

Help COLA spread the good news - Like us on [Facebook](#) & share COLA's posts.

Support COLA by contributing to the [Lac Courte Oreilles Foundation](#).

Are your neighbors and extended family members of COLA? If not, please ask them to [join](#).

Why "Short Ears, ...?"

Lac Courte Oreilles, or Lake Short Ears, is the name used by the first French traders who visited what was then known as Ottawa Lake. There are at least two explanations for the name "Lac Courte Oreilles." One traces to the practice of a local band of Ottawas who trimmed their ears. Another stems from the many small (ear-shaped?) bays located on big Lac Courte Oreilles. For additional information, see the references that follow.

Tales of Lac Courte Oreilles

This book, edited by Tom and Sue Burgess, together with COLA's history committee, provides a detailed history of Lac Courte Oreilles. The book is available through COLA and the [Sherman & Ruth Weiss Community Library](#) in Hayward.

Spirit of the Ojibwa Images of Lac Courte Oreilles Elders

A well-referenced compilation of paintings, stories, photographs, and history by Sara Balbin, James R. Bailey, and Thelma Nayquonabe, this book was published in 2012. It is available from the [Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community Library](#).

History Comes Alive

This 2004 publication, compiled and written by Caryl A. Pfaff and Ann Marie Penskov, is a compilation of community and history center photographs available from the [Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community Library](#).

[Archived issues of Short Ears, Long Tales](#)



COLA Mission: 1) to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of Lac Courte Oreilles and Little Lac Courte Oreilles, their shorelands and surrounding areas, while respecting the interests of property owners and the rights of the general public; and 2) to consider, study, survey and respond to issues deemed relevant by COLA's membership.

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