

## MIDWEST SAILING SCHOOLS KEEP IT SAFE AND FUN

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER: PAT DUNSWORTH

Camping in the woods or attending sailing school on West Lake Okoboji in Iowa were the two choices Kathleen Saltzman gave her girls last summer. With smiles and all the enthusiasm a nine and six-year-old can carry, Clare and Molly Saltzman chose sailing school. Now, it is a favorite part of the summer when staying at their lake home.

“They get to have an experience (at sailing school) they can’t have at home,” Kathleen, from Dakota Dunes, South Dakota, says. It’s another way to maximize their lake experience during the summer, which seems to come and go so quickly. “It makes the girls well rounded too,” she says.

Clare and Molly come off the water full of adventure stories. Extra windy days give the girls a rough ride in their untipable prams, just as the great A-scows have, in their own right. Even so, the instructors of the Okoboji Yacht Club Sailing School (OYCSS) offer indoor or outdoor learning experiences rain or shine.

Every day of camp, students meet in classrooms for instruction as do other sailing schools. Basics of sailboat anatomy, terminology and sail function, along with water safety are essentials instructors educate beginners with. Older, more advanced students learn detailed strategy and

tactics in the advanced classes. Regardless of age, students walk away with a sophisticated fluency in sailing nomenclature.

### FUN IS KEY

Nautical language and sailboat maneuvers come easy because it’s fun, says Brad Farrar, director of the OYCSS. Students as young as four-years-old sit in desktop chairs positioned in front of white boards with instructors as eager as the kids at the Okoboji Yacht Club. Learning to be an excellent sailor comes along naturally after the sailing school’s first two priorities, safety and fun.

“We try to keep it light...I think that helps,” Farrar comments. “We want the kids to come away from sailing school loving sailing. That comes above all else.” OYCSS curriculum balances classroom instruction with the priceless time on the water. There is no better way to learn than feeling the wind catch the sails. In no time their little fingers react with a strong grip moving the tiller to set the sailboat on course and make headway across the bay. Making friends and playing games is all part of the fun in learning for the nearly 300 young helmsmen that attend the weeklong camps throughout the summer. The competitive aspect is offered as the next step to feed their interest and expand their skills.

# READY ABOUT

RIGHT: Opti Nationals – Lake Geneva, Wis.


P. 47: TOP: ILYA X-Inland – Minnetonka, Minn.

MIDDLE: ISSA High School Laser – White Bear, Minn.

LEFT: Opti Mike Plant Memorial – Wayzata, Minn.





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PAT DUNSWORTH

Pat has been a freelance photographer for over 30 years, focusing on yacht-racing events in the Midwest. Based out of the Twin Cities, Pat has provided sailing images for several national and regional publications, specializing in youth events and inland scow competition. His goal is to always capture the excitement and beauty of sailboat racing.





### TRADITION LIVES ON

Sailing remains a tradition for families who have lived and vacationed in the Iowa Great Lakes for generations. That tradition remains true to the sailing schools across the upper Midwest. History and tradition are the factors that have planted solid roots to allow sailing school programs to grow over the years.

Although the sailor can't see the wind or the elements and forces at play, the students learn to craftily make decisions to move their boat across the lake, says Jeff Doubek, executive director of the Lake Geneva Sailing School. The school has a fleet of 50 boats, which are used to train both adults and youth. He has pulled together two high school teams that have learned to train together and are competitively growing. Plans to continue raising the bar for young sailors are running full steam ahead to battle against teams that are even more established.

The quality of instructors at these schools are drawn from the talented and dedicated sailors who have logged hundreds of hours on the lakes. Gordy Bowers is an impeccable example. The Deep Haven, Minn. native skipped into his first sailboat when his family moved onto the lake at 10-years-old. Years of competitive sailing put such an impression on him he decided to compliment the sport with teaching. His credentials found their height as head coach of the 1988 Olympic sailing team. He has now come home to give back to the Lake Minnetonka Sailing School that offered him so much in his early days of learning the sport.



**PRAM – 8 FEET:** The little sailboats Molly Saltzman learned on are called prams. Nearly unsinkable, these small and safe bathtub-like boats allow children to feel secure from tipping over. Minimizing the fear maximizes the learning experience.

**OPTIMIST – 8 FEET:** This single sail boat is the same small size as the pram, but it is geared for racing. The Opti isn't necessarily fast, allowing sailors up to 16-years-old race it.

**420 – 14 FEET:** A main sail and extra colorful spinnaker are used when sailing away from the wind to add horsepower. It is commonly used in high school and collegiate sailing programs and by sailors of all ages.

**LASER – 14 FEET:** This high performance boat shines with its single sail. Advanced sailors of all ages race this very fast and agile boat. Lasers are even a class of boats sailed in the Olympics.

**X BOAT – 16 FEET:** With a main sail and jib, this racing boat is on the decline. However, popularity remains strong on the inland lakes of Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. It's not particularly fast, but very established and is raced by kids up to 16-years-old.



- P. 48: TOP LEFT: 420 Junior Olympics – Chicago, Ill.  
 TOP RIGHT: 420 Junior Olympics – Chicago, Ill.  
 MIDDLE: 420 US Sailing Regional Qualifier – Minnetonka, Minn.  
 P. 49: MIDDLE LEFT: Opti Mike Plant Memorial – Wayzata, Minn.  
 MIDDLE RIGHT: ILYA X-Inland – Minnetonka, Minn.  
 BOTTOM: Opti Sailing School – White Bear, Minn.

“My roots are here (in Deephaven), and I feel obligated to work with the kids in our area,” he says with delight. The staff of 19 teaches and trains 600 sailing students to take to the lake each year. From the ice breaking in April to the competitions in mid-November, Bowers works with students at all levels. Even in the winter months, he tries to get the elite students on the lake for ice boating.

**SMART MOVES**

Having fun goes without saying for Bowers. The character and dedication it takes to continue on with the sport, whether competitive or as hobby, says a lot about a person from his perspective. The accomplished 54-year-old still sails competitively today. That keeps the coaching skills fresh and innovative, he says.

“Sailing has everything...maybe that is what hooked me as a kid,” he says. As the wind shifts and the waves carry the sailor further from shore, they must decide where to go, what to do. Such tactical decisions demonstrate a person’s intellectual stamina and, at the height of competition, may reveal physical strength and endurance, according to Bowers.

Short-term decisions are executed within the framework of a long-range plan. The wind, waves and course are the obstacles that present

the challenge. “The smart guys are three moves ahead, always planning the next leg before you finish the one you are on,” Bowers says.

For others, racing takes a seat to peacefulness. This invigorating experience is for anyone to enjoy at any age, says Holly Davenport, director of the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center. “With knowledge of the boat system and how the wind plays, sailing requires minimal strength.”

Safety, fun and education are the same three priorities her 28-year-old program has taught over 12,000 individuals. Davenport’s staff of 40 takes Fridays to focus on helping individuals with disabilities and special needs to learn to sail. “Anyone can learn to sail regardless of age, race, strength... really, there are few barriers to sailing,” she says.



Pictured in her white visor and colorful sailing gear, Molly Saltzman, 6, says she and her friends definitely have fun learning how to sail at the Okoboji Yacht Club Sailing School in Okoboji, Iowa.

## MAKE SENSE OF SAILING

Make the lingo part of your language. Or, at least know what your sailing enthusiast friends are talking about.

**AFT** at or near the stern.

**APPARENT WIND** the direction and speed of the wind felt by the crew that is a combination of the true wind and the wind created by the motion of the boat.

**BOW** the forward end of the boat.

**BOOM** supporting pole that secures the foot of a sail.

**COME ABOUT** to change course to sail at the same angle, but with the wind on the other side.

**COURSE** the direction in which a vessel is steered.

**JIB** the triangular headsail set forward of the foremast.

**FOREMAST** mast nearest to the bow.

**HEADSAIL** sail set forward of the foremost mast of the boat.

**HEADWAY** moving forward.

**KEEL** the centerline backbone at the bottom of a boat.

**LEEWARD** away from the wind; the direction to which the wind blows, down wind.

**SPAR** pole, mast, or boom that supports a sail.

**SPINNAKER** a large, light, balloon-shaped sail set forward of the mainsail when running before the wind.

**STERN** the back of the boat.

**MAINSAIL** boomed sail projected toward the end of the boat from the primary, vertical pole to which the sails, ropes and wires are attached.

**MAINMAST** primary pole (mast) on the boat.

**READY ABOUT** prepare for changing course and be aware the boom is shifting.

**TILLER** short piece of wood that turns the rudder, which turns the boat.

