

MAKING HEADWAY!

Youth2Adult — Y2A — is a series of articles celebrating sailing's role in youth development for Caribbean children.

Perspective is everything. For sailors, we each have our stories and perspectives based on the locale(s) and way(s) in which we learned to sail. For me, it was racing dinghies in southern California. How about for you?

Not taking away anything from the hard work and efforts of many people over many decades teaching and advancing sailing within the Caribbean, my insights began with a 2009 Caribbean foray. With my partner, I began living on a 40-foot sloop actively cruising in the Eastern Caribbean. I was immediately drawn to West Indian children, and local children's reading programs and junior sailing were where I found my niche, ultimately supporting youth development through Learn to Sail programs. To enlist region-wide support it became necessary to include racing along with recreational sailing.

Here's a look at recent headway made in youth sailing in ten Caribbean nations.

- Sharon Hardwick, Chair of the Belize Sailing Association (BzSA): "Seven years ago there was only the Belize Sea Scouts that were using three Bosun boats originally designed to train Royal Navy sailors. About five years ago some individuals got together and formed the Belize Sailing Association. The starting point of this association was an Optimist program. The founders raised, through corporate sponsorship, funds for the purchase of 26 Optimists that were principally based in Belize City. This rapidly generated interest in other parts of the country and we now have eight clubs and over 50 Optimists. The interest and membership of the clubs ebbs and wanes as children age out and move onto bigger things. The Optimist program has spawned attendance at several international Optimist events and the beginnings of a Laser fleet."

- Peter Holmberg, professional sailor and 1988 Finn Olympic Silver Medalist served as the Caribbean Sailing Association's president from 2011 through 2015. "One of my proudest achievements while at the helm of the CSA as president was to help form the Sailing Development Committee and incorporate it as one of the pillars of our CSA organization when we created a set of bylaws in 2013. Thanks to Ellen Birrell and her committee that launched the initial program, it is now growing and achieving great steps to ensure growing the very roots of our sport of sailing."

- In St. Vincent & the Grenadines and St. Kitts & Nevis, local sailors propelled support for youth sailing in their respective island nations to the higher levels. Each formed a national sailing federation. Bequia's Eddie Brown commented in 2015: "The idea behind it [formation of a federal sailing organization in St. Vincent & the Grenadines] is that the push for [local traditional] double-enders keeps tradition alive, but if we want to go farther afield we need to do it in Optis and other international classes. That was the idea behind forming the association. That is the idea: to be able to move forward with assistance from ISAF (now called World Sailing). The traditional boats are not recognized outside the Grenadines."

- In St. Kitts & Nevis, it was Mark Theron leading the march toward a national sailing association, beginning in 2011. His goal: "To establish sustainable youth sailing." After finalizing the paperwork and legal elements to create the St. Kitts & Nevis Sailing Association (SKNSA), he and his association team worked to become recognized by their National Olympic Committee. Within the past year, Mark launched an effort to establish a CSA Sailing and Training Certification program that, as a new CSA Board Member, Mark hopes to present to the CSA Board for confirmation within the upcoming year. (That is the subject of a future Y2A article.)

- No bigger strides to advance the teaching of sailing to all island children were made than those made in Antigua. In the 2009 timeframe, then Antigua Yacht Club Commodore Elizabeth Jordan was reaching out to yachtspeople who entered Falmouth Harbour. She suggested they donate one US dollar for each foot of boat length to support Antiguan youth sailing. At the same time she approached the Antiguan government and gained its support for teaching Antiguan children an RYA (the UK's Royal Yachting Association, which

provides internationally respected qualifications) curriculum within the country's elementary school system. In 2010, driven largely by Mrs. Jordan, the Antigua National Sailing Academy (NSA) was incorporated as a non-profit (charitable) organization under the laws of Antigua & Barbuda and is administered by a board of volunteers. Since then, NSA leased a sizable piece of property along the bayfront, converting some of its buildings into revenue-generators providing lodging accommodations, kayak and paddleboard rentals, and qualified sailing instruction. All funds sustain NSA. NSA's motto: "Kids Get Sailing". (For more information, check out nationalsailingacademy.org.)

- "Youth sailing is alive and thriving at the Sint Maarten Yacht Club in Simpson Bay at the Dutch bridge!" says Ariel Jamil, Manager of the Sint Maarten Yacht Club. "We have over 60 students in our program during the school year, as well as a very active camp over the summer. We employ two fantastic certified sailing instructors who teach everything from beginner sailing to advanced racing tactics, and we conduct a monthly dinghy regatta series. We send our racing students to St. Barth's Mini Bucket and Anguilla's Dinghy Regatta annually. The SMYC hosts the Sol St. Maarten Optimist Championship every November, one of the largest dinghy regattas in the



region. We also actively work to place our students on locally owned keelboats to give them the experience of racing larger boats.

"Only about 25 percent of our students are children of adult club members. Many are local school children and several are sponsored by generous community businesses and corporations who realize the importance of the SMYC Youth Sailing Program. Our job is to promote sailing not only on St. Maarten but Caribbean-wide. We are grateful to local sponsors and look forward to raising as many champion youth sailors as possible."

Michele Korteweg of the St. Maarten-based Kidz at Sea program, also weighs in, "Getting the youth interested in sailing is the first step in introducing them to the marine industry, which is one of the largest industries in St. Maarten. In order to be able to hire skilled and qualified laborers in this particular industry, we need to teach them at a young age and show them the different aspects of the industry. Sailing is integral if they want to work on charter boats or megayachts, but that's only one aspect of the industry. By taking them to businesses like riggers, sailmakers and marine electricians, the children realize at a young age what opportunities are out there and can work towards developing a suitable skill set for a particular job. In addition, our program offers the children the opportunity to develop their personal skill set, such as teamwork, confidence, leadership and discipline."

- Few Bahamian youth sailors compete in sailing events on islands other than Bermuda and the Cayman Islands. Regarding getting their youth sailing in Caribbean events, Lori E. Lowe, President of the Bahamas Sailing Association, said, "Florida is significantly closer to the Bahamas than the Eastern Caribbean. I believe the only direct flights from The Bahamas to the Caribbean are to Jamaica, Cuba and the Cayman Islands. While culturally and as a small island nation state our preference would be to have our youth compete in the Caribbean, it is hard to get past the fact that we are on Florida's door-

step. Time and money are big factors in a program that runs on donations in a tax system that does not promote donations. That being said, the Bahamas Sailing Association would be happy to promote Caribbean racing to our youth sailors and to assist our Optimist Fleet in organizing an International Regatta or introducing our youth to possible donors."

- While the Grenada Sailing Association (GSA) has existed for decades, its principal function had been supporting large keelboat racing and supporting regional regattas that include both yachts built to the latest racing rule, old IOR racers, other cruising yachts competing under the CSA racing rule and local boats that don't appear to race under any rule. Since 2009, we've watched GSA, largely through the efforts of board member Jacqui Pascall, take a stronger communication and administrative role for youth sailing development. Creating grenadasailingassociation.org in 2013, GSA acts as a central communicator between youth programs. There is now regular training of youth sailors to become the coaches of tomorrow by sending them to training clinics in Trinidad as well as having World Sailing training clinics held in Grenada. As simultaneous administrator of both Grenada's World Sailing Member National Association and the GSA, Jacqui connects youth sailing organizations to information about youth events, training and shared resources. It is ever a work in progress, and each locale around the island has indefatigable sailing supporters such as Laura Fletcher, Rees Evans, Allison Caton, Kevin Banfield, Rene and Daniela Froelich, Terry Neilson, Sarah Baker and others. Grenada can now report youth sailing occurring at Grenada Marine in St. David's, the village of Woburn, Grenada Yacht Club in St. George's, Gouyave Sailing School, and L'Esterre Junior Sailing in Carriacou.

- Mark Loe of Trinidad & Tobago Sailing Association (TTSA) has this to say: "We expanded and now have sailing schools in two other locations on the island (Trinidad). Currently they are run by interested parties/parents, and the instructors are trained and salaries paid by government assistance. These schools offer mostly free sailing to the communities with some assistance from corporate entities in their areas. We have plans to expand further with two more schools, one of which will be in Tobago. Financing is the eternal problem and with our economy recently struggling, government funding has been cut drastically. We are now stepping up our pursuit of corporate sponsorship."

- "St. Thomas Yacht Club is introducing a unique concept of sailing instruction, boat access and racing through the opening of the St. Thomas Sailing Center," says Margo Lynch. "Now, with our fleet of IC-24s, sailors from the Virgin Islands and around the world — from beginners to seasoned racers — can enjoy greater access to boats, programs and sailing waters than they might typically expect in a private Caribbean yacht club setting."

- Jay Steed tells us, "Now coming to the end of my first year as Commodore of the Montserrat Yacht Club (MYC), we are enthusiastic about having a youth sailing program. However, having only three dinghies ready to sail, and with no stable clubhouse or revenue coming in, we'll start resurrecting all of the dinghies we find hiding beneath the ash and ponder how to restore MYC." Even 20 years after Montserrat's Soufriere Hills volcanic eruption that devastated the island, there is limited recorded data from their clubhouse. Given an island population of fewer than 5,000 and current MYC membership's median age of 65, Steed says, "The injection of a younger generation of sailing enthusiasm may be what it will take to regenerate MYC from its (current) dormant state. We are now forming a sailing academy sub-committee, and are hopeful that 2017 is the year that Montserrat Yacht Club Sailing Academy's sails will be unfurled and catch the wind!"

To think that in the past seven years, three Caribbean nations formed national sailing associations driven by passion for youth development through junior sailing, as well as the past and current presidents of CSA pledging it as their priority, puts wind in our sails. We are making headway into this New Year!

Ellen Birrell attributes her opportunity to cruise the Caribbean aboard S/V Boldly Go to life skills built in childhood. Believing swimming and sailing are essentials for island youth, she supports grassroots and competitive junior sailing and serves as chair of sailing development for Caribbean Sailing Association (<http://caribbean-sailing.com/sailing-development/the-future-of-caribbean-sailing>).