

Celebrating the Ordinary: Strong winds add to the excitement of Able Sailing



Photo courtesy Community Living Parry Sound
Becky Jones learns sailing techniques from Eric Cartlidge



Photo courtesy Erik Deiters, Sail Parry Sound
Eric Cartlidge and Tracy Coulas enjoy sailing on Georgian Bay

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by Courtney Norrie

On July 12 and 13, approximately 20 people with disabilities went sailing at Sail Parry Sound, on Georgian Bay. The first morning started off a little cloudy with a few rain drops falling from the sky, but as the day progressed so did the weather. It turned out to be sunny and very windy. The strong winds made sailing just that little bit more exciting for participants. The waves were crashing against the dock and the boats were rocking, but this didn't stop those anxiously waiting to get into the sailing vessels.

Ontario Sailing Program Director and Able Sail Instructor Eric Cartlidge was impressed with the winds of mighty Georgian Bay, and the facilities at Sail Parry Sound. He travels across Ontario to introduce the Able Sail program to communities. Able Sail is an accessible sailing program that offers trained instructors and accessible sailboats so anyone can sail, regardless of experience or ability. First time sailor Becky Jones says she "loved sailing and the freedom that came along with it, I could actually drive the boat. I am tied to my wheelchair most of the day".

A chance to take the wheelchair out of the picture was welcomed by participants. Wheelchairs are often barriers for people because they cannot fit in small spaces or through narrow doorways. Barrier free activities offer a sense of freedom and opens the door to more activities. Able Sail offers barrier free sailing for everyone.

The work of Sail Parry Sound – as well as all partnering agencies – toward this project and seeing it through, was appreciated.

There are many people in this world with lots of skills, but often people are not given the opportunity to use them and see them grow. When organizations such as Sail Parry Sound are willing and excited to work local agencies it makes it much easier to get people with disabilities involved in community life.

With all the partnering agencies, including Community Living Parry Sound, the Friends, RISE, Muskoka Parry Sound Community Mental Health and the Belvedere Heights van volunteer driver, Gail Mayhew, this was a true community project that brought together people from various agencies and walks of life to bring something positive to the community.

Many of the participants commented that they are very interested in learning how to sail, with lessons in the future. Becky says she is excited about the opportunity to take lessons and sail more often.

"We are delighted with the response to the Able Sail weekend," said Sail Parry Sound President Larry Woolner. "It was a pleasure to be able to host it here, with the generous assistance of all the community organizations who partnered with us, and the Ontario Sailing Association. Sail Parry Sound will host another weekend event next year, as well as a full week of Able Sail instruction."

"Having the same opportunities in life as everyone else is important," says Becky. Equal opportunities to participate in leisure activities are just as important as equal access to employment. Leisure activities have the power to put a smile on someone's face and raise their quality of life. Sailing is a recreation and leisure activity that allows people with disabilities to leave their disability behind and just sail. "