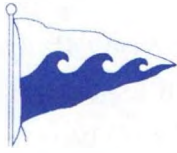


OFF SOUNDINGS CLUB



Frank Bohlen, Commodore
1 Scott Lane
Mystic, Connecticut 06355

Home (860) 536-1908
Office (860) 405-9176

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Dear Off-Soundings Club Member

This bright sunny Saturday with the wind chill hovering around -20°F provides an ideal opportunity for those of us not fortunate enough to be in warmer climes to reflect on the year past and to organize plans for the upcoming sailing season. 1999 was for Off-Soundings an "interesting" year beginning with Commodore Anderson's passing of the Flag after a job "well-done", followed by a successful Spring series, with weather standing in sharp contrast to that experienced in 1998, and then the cancellation of the Fall series due to the threat posed by Hurricane Floyd. Historian Ames reports that this was the first time that an entire series was canceled before the race day. I can assure you that precedent setting was the last thing on the minds of those involved in making this decision! Communication of the decision to the membership was greatly facilitated by the access generously provided by the MUDHEADS to their Web site. For this we are very grateful.

After reviewing this year's activities your Board of Governors has over the past three months been focusing especial effort on three primary areas; participation, safety, and communications. **Participation** is a matter of particular concern. In recent years all sailing organizations have experienced a decrease in race entries. The reasons are manifold and complex. Most agree that it is simply a matter of time; increasing demands and finite supply. Recognizing this, we have from time to time introduced selective changes in our Race Series in the interest of providing the broadest possible appeal. As indicated last April, I believe that our events represent a unique component of the regional sailing scene. An opportunity to join together at the beginning of each season to "shakedown" boat and crew in anticipation of the racing and/or cruising to come and to gather again at the end of the season to assess performance and to exchange sea-stories. We seek to accommodate sailing families, the cruiser/ racer, and the grand-prix competitor within an area extending from Narragansett Bay to central Long Island Sound.

Recognizing the challenge inherent in these goals, I have asked the Long Range Planning Committee, chaired by Past Commodore Anderson, to review all aspects of Club operations and to assess the need for and form of change. This review is to be comprehensive and should include consideration of race venue, modification of race format and duration, and the possibility of the addition of a number of new classes including one-design mono or multi-hulls as well as classics and development designs. Member participation in this process is essential. Without your input pro and con the Committee will be acting in a vacuum, a process that tends to maintain the status quo. Please don't hesitate to send your thoughts to Commodore Anderson.

In the interest of facilitating this exchange of ideas and to continue the past practice of introducing potential new members we are again holding mid-winter luncheons at a number of locations across the region. The first was held in West Hartford just before Christmas. The next **luncheon** is scheduled for noon on **Wednesday, February 9, 2000 at the Seahorse-On-Thames** one (1) mile north of Electric Boat in Groton ((860)449-0074. Five (5) dollars buys lunch w/o drinks. This is less than the cost of a "brown-bag"! **Call Ed Purcell at (860)536-6732** by February 7 to make a reservation. I expect subsequent luncheons will be held in Branford later in the month. We're also exploring the possibility of one in Rhode Island. Look for the notices of these latter luncheons in the mail.

Moving on to **safety**; this is a subject that the Off-Soundings Club has been particularly sensitive to since its inception. We all remember race series that have tested vessel seaworthiness as well as the grit and skill of the crew (Spring, 1998 e.g.). Based on this experience the Club has over the years published a **Minimum Equipment and Accommodation Standard**. From time to time this Standard is updated to take into consideration ongoing changes in materials and safety equipment, and the most recent deliberations of the Offshore Racing Council (ORC). We seek to maintain a high level of safety without the imposition of un-necessary regulation or attempting to legislate common-sense.

With these criteria in mind a committee chaired by Treasurer Bob Geary and including Norm Rabe, Dick Roberts, and Past Commodore Bill Gunther began a review of the existing Minimum Standard in October, 1999 and presented their results to the Board of Governors yesterday. The revised Standards, approved by the Board, differ little in substance from earlier versions but adhere more closely to the ORC recommendations 1998-1999. Copies of the revised Standards will be available shortly and can be obtained, prior to the Spring Race Series, by a call to Race Secretary

Roberts. I would hope that all members take some time over the next few months to review these new Standards as well as the current ORC Safety Recommendations (available from US Sailing). I'm sure that each of us will find the time well spent. Correction of noted deficiencies can only serve to increase confidence in our ability to handle any condition encountered on the race course or cruising.

Of course emphasis simply on structural detail without consideration of the human element ignores the most important "safety factor". We all recognize that safe passage requires both a seaworthy vessel and a skilled and functioning crew. While the published Standards deal primarily with seaworthiness, the importance of crew selection, preparation and preservation has often been taken for granted. A variety of data exist to show that this is a serious mistake. In recognition of this fact the subject of crew selection and safety is receiving increasing attention in the yachting press and is dealt with in some detail at the various **Safety At Sea Seminars** sponsored by or run in collaboration with Cruising World. These seminars typically include both lectures and hands-on demonstrations as well as a variety of vendor exhibits displaying the latest in safety equipment and clothing. This is a great opportunity to examine and try-on a variety of personal safety equipment, including PFD's and safety harnesses, increase our understanding of the cause and control of seasickness, and to begin development of an ability to treat the most common sailing injuries. One such seminar is scheduled for the weekend of **March 11, 2000 in Newport, Rhode Island**. Rear Commodore Brooks as Chairman of the Safety at Sea Committee of CCA is organizing this event and would be happy to provide you with schedules and costs. I have participated in several of these seminars and never fail to learn something of value. I encourage you to seriously consider attendance.

While on the subject of safety, I was reminded yesterday by Fleet Surgeon Warren Woodworth of the value of individual **CPR and First Aid training** and the need for each vessel in the fleet to be as nearly medically self-sufficient as possible. In the event of an on-board accident or medical emergency the incidental help that can be provided by the Doctors sailing in the fleet is no substitute for at-hand assistance. The ability to provide this often makes the difference between minor and major injury. As part of the Spring regimen all owners are encouraged to review their medical kits and supporting literature. If there are any questions don't hesitate to call Warren.

Finally, with regard to **communications**; the value of improved communications (beyond mail and phone) was made particularly clear during the period of Hurricane Floyd. As noted above, dissemination of information regarding race status was significantly improved through the use of the Web. In little more than an hour after

posting, a significant fraction of the membership knew of the decision and were passing the message along and making plans to shelter their boats. This speed of transmission was impressive and could clearly benefit the Club in a variety of areas. In addition to schedules and race status we could, for example, post the majority of race entry information (protocols, entry forms, guest invitations, etc) on a web site and provide near real-time race results. We might also post ancillary information such as sources of housing in Block Island or Shelter Island, join with other clubs to establish a crew clearinghouse, and provide links to a variety of commercial vendors and government agencies (including the National Weather Service). The combination could at once increase Club visibility and accessibility, simplify race entry, and allow the membership to better plan the time associated with event participation.

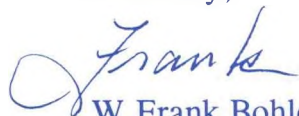
Given this range of potential benefits I've asked Public Relations Chairman Bill Loweth to establish a small committee for the purposes of drafting a proposal outlining the items to be included at a **Web site** including management requirements and costs. The results of their deliberations are to be presented to the Board of Governors prior to the Annual Meeting in April, 2000. Bill, as you may know, is quite familiar with this subject having developed Web sites recently for Ram Island Yacht Club and ECSA. I've also asked Secretary Smyth to begin compilation of member **e-mail addresses**. You'll receive his request with the upcoming dues mailing. Please send along your address with your dues. Know that we will not publish these addresses and that they will be used only for Club associated communications.

As you can see it's a busy and important time for the Off-Soundings Club and one that will benefit from your participation. If you have any thoughts on the above subjects, or others, please don't hesitate to call me or any member of the Board. We value your opinions and will give all the most serious consideration.

I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Dinner in April, if not before.

Here's to a Fine New Year !!

Sincerely,



W. Frank Bohlen
Commodore