

THE DOWNTOWN SAILING CENTER

A BRIEF HISTORY

By Doug Silber, January 2012

Edited and Updated by Stuart Proctor, January 2021

History: 1989 - 2012

The for profit Downtown Sailing Club (“Club”) was founded in 1989 by Doug Silber and Jef Eyring (as a part time venture) to make sailing in Baltimore affordable by offering shared use of a small fleet (then four) J-22’s and a private hoist located at the just opened HarborView Marina. The Club charged members \$600 annually for unlimited use of its boats. Julia Silber was hired to run the day-to-day operation, develop and implement marketing strategies and a new junior sailing program and outreach programs. The Club also provided adult fleet and match racing and adult sailing instruction. For outreach, the Club provided opportunities for at-risk youth and a regatta in conjunction with the Maryland School for the Blind, with boats helmed by visually impaired children.

In the fall of 1993, the owners other obligations did not allow them time to continue running the Club. Rather than selling the popular J-22’s to the Annapolis sailing community, the owners proposed to the 40 members the idea of forming a social sailing club to buy the operation and run it on a volunteer basis, offering to finance the purchase at favorable terms. Over the winter (1993-1994), some of the members organized and incorporated the non-profit Downtown Sailing *Center* (“Center”) and elected an America’s Cup naval architect, James “Jim” Gretskey, its first president. The purchase of the four J-22’s and hoist was financed over five years by the Club’s owners.

The Center was run entirely by its members for the first several years. The only paid staff was the summer camp staff, hired and managed by Julia Silber, who was also responsible for continued development of the junior program which grew to 250 children annually during her tenure which lasted through 2001. Marketing, maintenance and budgets were handled by the members led by the board. For nominal rent, HarborView Marina allowed the use of a largely vacant marina and for the placement of small office trailer on a vacant lot near the water. The emphasis continued to be on low cost sailing, a summer camp, social events, recreational sailing and racing. As membership grew, additional boats were added.

After a few years, the board realized it needed an executive director to manage the growing operation. G. Kirk Culbertson, who had previously served (1995-1996) as board president after Jim Gretskey, was hired as a part time executive director.

Around the same time, the Center signed on to serve as a partner (along with other City non-profits) with the fledgling *SuperKids Camp*, run by the Parks and People Foundation, to provide inner city at-risk grade school children with intensive reading training during the summer in exchange for coming to a fun camp, including sailing. The Center reached an agreement with the neighboring Baltimore Museum of Industry (“BMI”) to allow the

SuperKids/DSC program to run at that site. Ultimately, with HarborView Marina beginning to fill up and landside development at HarborView gearing up, the Center negotiated a three year agreement with the BMI to move its entire operation there. The Center purchased several old wooden floating dock systems from a nearby marina and secured them to the BMI waterfront with ropes and anchors, putting them into use with donated materials and volunteer labor. The Center also persuaded Baltimore City to rehabilitate an abandoned 180 foot long pier immediately west of the BMI and, with the donation of an old steamship gangway as a bridge to that pier, was able to substantially expand its outreach programs for inner city youth and for disabled sailing programs.

Natalie Maier (1997-1999) and Steve Gross (2000-2002), both new sailors who had joined the Center and learned to sail, each served as Board president, each being responsible for achieving the Board's five year goals of achieving significant growth in membership, adult, junior and outreach programs, and a commensurate expansion of the fleet and paid staff. The small seasonal staff ran the day to day operations, coordinating volunteers who handled the bulk of the operational tasks, such as "work parties", marketing, a newsletter, social events, taught adult sailing lessons and ran sailboat races.

At the beginning of 2000, the three year lease with BMI was extended on a year-to-year basis, the wooden docks required regular repairs, and the agreement for the use of the City restored pier was found to have been approved, without proper authority, by a former city official from a former administration. The Center needed new docks, but lacked a place to put them or money to acquire them. And the majority of the water in front of the BMI was littered with over 300 rotted piles and a sunken barge (north of the Governor McLane). A major program partner lost its funding and was terminated, and other program partners were experiencing funding shortages. Our desire to continue and expand outreach programs was bolstered, however, by the success of the newly developed S.I.T. program and fledging disabled sailing programs which were covered by donated funds of approximately \$35,000.

Doug Silber (former owner of the private Club) followed Steve Gross as Board president (2003-2005, 2007-2008). Early in 2003, the Board's focus shifted in recognition of funding and facility realities in order to preserve the Center's future. The goals were to secure a permanent home, a permanent facility and shift the focus to more fundraising to enable the Center to honor its commitment to greatly expand community outreach and disabled sailing programs. To do this, the Board needed to focus on big picture issues, allowing paid staff to run the day-to-day operation and recruit and coordinate volunteer efforts.

In the fall of 2003, the Board ramped up on-and-off discussions with BMI about a long term deal. At the same time, the Center experienced major damage to the City pier (supporting the wooden B and C docks) from the Tropical Storm Isabel. By the Fall 2004, the Center and BMI approved final terms and a 99 year lease with the BMI was signed in January 2005.

In the Spring of 2005, the Board launched a national search for an Executive Director, and received serious interest and applications from over 50 qualified individuals from as far away as

Texas, California and New England. After a six month process, and with the realization that a major focus was the development of a permanent marina facility, the Board hired Baltimorean Jerry Hauprich, an engineer and large institution facilities project manager, to be Executive Director for a two year transition period. Nolan North was elected Board president at the 2006 Annual Meeting.

Shortly after Mr. Hauprich's arrival in the fall of 2005, the Center was presented with a unique opportunity to develop a new marina utilizing State grant funds and the donation by the City of concrete floating dock system located at the Inner Harbor. With support from the Baltimore Development Corporation and State and City elected officials, the Board was able to secure a line of credit from Carrollton Bank, several major gifts and grants (including the donated City floating docks) and completed phase one in Spring of 2007. Doug Silber was elected Board president at the 2007 Annual Meeting to serve until the winter 2008.

With the completion of the first phase of the marina project, Mr. Hauprich turned his focus to fundraising with great success. Peter Hegel returned as the Director of Youth and Outreach, building on his prior success with the S.I.T. program. Mr. Hegel, with strong support from former Board president Steve Gross, grew the Accessible Sailing programs as well as the outreach programs. In the Spring of 2008, The DSC brought on board Steve Maddox, a respected US Sailing certified instructor and instructor trainer. Having run another smaller sailing program, Mr. Maddox took on the mantle of Director of Operations, focusing on boat and dock repairs, adult education and general daily operations. With Mr. Maddox's arrival, Mr. Hauprich shifted into more of a Development Director role, with the Board's executive committee overseeing the overall operation. In the fall of 2008, upon recommendations by the Maryland Association of Non-Profit Organizations ("MANO"), the Board amended the by-laws to bring it in line with other large public annual membership non-profits like the National Aquarium, the Science Center and the area museums. With the amendments, the Board selected its own members and officers. The changes were announced and explained to the general membership at the 2009 Annual Meeting.

Mark Shapiro, former Board treasurer, was elected Board president at the 2009 Annual Meeting. Because of the financial collapse on Wall Street and the slumping economy, the focus in 2009 was in belt-tightening and necessary re-structuring. Mr. Hauprich announced his desire to move towards retirement, and Mr. Hegel announced his decision to move out of state at the end of the year. Fundraising continued to be strong for 2009 despite the economy. The website was overhauled thanks to the generous and talented volunteers. The Boat Acquisition and Disposal ("BAD") committee was successful in securing several significant donations that would be used in The DSC's many programs. In the summer of 2009, DSC member Kathleen Lester helped make the Third Annual Sail for Kids fundraiser a big success netting The DSC \$30,000 to go toward outreach programs. Sail for Kids had been conceived and implemented in 2007 by Board members Merritt Keffer and Marc Ottinger in conjunction with the Baltimore City Yacht Association.

Steve Smith was elected President in the winter of 2010 with an announced focus of making the Board and the staff more professional. After Mr. Hauprich's retirement, and a two day Board/Staff retreat at MANO, Mr. Smith recommended and, in April 2010, the Board hired Mr. Kristen Berry, a nationally recognized sailing coach with a strong background in politics, communications and volunteer recruitment/organization, to be its third Executive Director. At Mr. Smith's request, the Board approved the formation of an Executive Committee comprised of the four officers and staffed by the Executive Director, it being determined that this smaller group could address and react more quickly to issues needing board-level attention, but not necessarily a full board vote. Focus was on improved organization, improved standards at all levels, including staff, programs and facilities, and improved communication.

During 2010 and 2011, under the leadership of Mr. Smith as Board president and Mr. Berry as Executive Director, great strides were made on all facets of the organization. Mr. Berry recruited outstanding staff, including Ms. Lynn Handy who filled and expanded the role as outreach director started by Mr. Peter Hegel (under whose tenure the well regarded S.I.T. program was first developed), and expanded the Accessible Program with the indefatigable assistance of Steve Gross. A complete survey of the fleet, rigs and sails was undertaken, the financials were submitted to a rigorous review and fresh input from a much needed Finance Committee, led by Treasurer Trevor Smith and new board members Lisa Berringer and Jim Koehnlein and key staff member Grady Byus. All programs underwent improvements, instructor standards were raised. And, through a generous second grant by the State of Maryland, some old wood docks were replaced and a new 2,500 square foot Accessible Sailing staging area was developed at the "T" head on the main "A" pier, making the Accessible Program the centerpiece of The DSC facility. The third annual Sail for Kids event was a resounding success as an "all DSC" event and fundraiser, and the annual fall YaGotta Regatta was the best ever. And, through the persistence of the Board, and with support of Mr. Berry and Board member Doug Silber, The DSC was able to secure approval of a 25 year lease of the water in front of the Fire Department Maintenance Facility, bringing its riparian rights under long term lease to over 4 acres of water.

The end of the 2011 fiscal year saw major accomplishments and important changes, including most noteworthy, the drafting and adoption of a Strategic Plan through a comprehensive effort led by Kathleen Lester. Under Ms. Lester's leadership, and with the strong support of Mr. Berry, the Board revisited and adopted a Mission Statement and Vision Statement. The Board revised and re-confirmed its operating agreement with the Baltimore Museum of Industry and, with Mr. Berry's and Mr. Smith's leadership, achieved a greatly improved relationship with the BMI. The end of 2011 also saw some departures of long time board members David Goldstein, Peter Bowe and Doug Silber, who agreed to be the founding members of a fundraising committee to be called "The Afterguard." On a sad note, past board president, friend, visionary and super volunteer Steve Gross – the father of DSC's Accessible Program, died suddenly and unexpectedly; dozens of DSC members and program participants served as an "honor guard" at his funeral.

The 2012 fiscal year commenced with the election of Ms. Kathleen Lester as Board president, joined on the executive committee by Lisa Berringer, William Intner, Trevor Smith and Steve

Smith (as immediate past president). Mr. Berry announced his decision to resign as Executive Director in April 2012, after completion of two years of service, but indicated a strong desire to remain involved as a consultant, advisor and member.

2012 –

2012 was a year of transition and change. Five executive leaders, including assistance from Board Chair Kathleen Lester, culminated with Lynn Handy ascending to the Executive Director Position. Under her guidance, The DSC embarked on a new chapter to make sailing more inclusive across programs. Damien Davis took the mantle of Board President, serving through 2017. Damien had previously served as Treasurer and then Vice President, working very closely with Kathleen. Lynn brought her passion for youth and community investment to the fore of The DSC's actions. Charley Tucker, who also served as Treasurer and Vice President during Mr. Davis's tenure, stepped up to serve as Board President for 2018 & 2019.

In the fall of 2018, Lynn took new career opportunities after an impressive service to the organization. Stuart Proctor was hired as the new Executive Director in 2019 and now works alongside board President Chris Rossi, who took the reigns in 2020. Carrying forth Lynn's vision of inclusion and opportunity, Stuart leads a team that is dedicated to making sailing inclusive across all programs.

Editor's Note: Many thanks to Doug Silber for keeping and sharing the history of The DSC. Doug was the first visionary of The DSC and is joined by a host of many other women and men who have made significant contributions to our beloved organization. The DSC marches forth under the motto "Sailing is for Everyone" and seeks to live out its vision of leading as a "world class community sailing center." Thank you for being a part of our journey.
-STP, January 2021