



Salty Sisters

Salty Sisters

... A vibrant force on and off the water ...



Early Salties: Bonnie Rowe, left, Captain Betty Jennings, Lillian Rees in 1952. SPYC ARCHIVE



SPYC's team for an early 1960s GYA Women's Championship Regatta was Bonnie Holloway, left, Nancy Lucas, Jane Wray and Margaret McClure. BONNIE HOLLOWAY KUNTZ COLLECTION

Previous page: The Florida Women's Sailing Association Championship Regatta in May 2008, hosted by SPYC's Salty Sisters, was for spinnaker Sonars and non-spinnaker Rhodes. Ten club sailors from Venice, Sarasota and SPYC raced on all-women teams. SPYC's Dave Ellis conducted an introductory clinic that was followed by two weeks of practice at the St. Petersburg Sailing Center. Among the winners were SPYC Salty Sister team No.1 for spinnakers, skippered by Lori Leadbetter, with crew Helen Larsen, Rosemary Sherman and Linda Meehan, and non-spinnaker SPYC mixed team, skippered by Brooke Taliaferro. COURTESY OF FAY NICHOLSON / ST. PETERSBURG TIMES ARCHIVE

In the fall of 1951, under the guidance of W.W. "Doc" Jennings, a group of 10 women, all of them wives of St. Petersburg Yacht Club members, formed a new sailing group at SPYC known as the Salty Sisters. The charter members were Eleanor Ellis, Betty Jennings, Dottie Lang, Joyce McEvoy, Mary Jane Misener, Margie Peterson, Joey Powell, Ruth Rifley, June Schowe and Phyllis Shaver. Two of this founding group, Rifley and Misener, are life members. Originally, membership was limited to wives of members of SPYC. In 1956, this qualification was amended to include any female member of the yacht club age 21 or older.

There was precedent for the Salty Sisters. A *St. Pe-*

tersburg Times article from Nov. 17, 1940, describes the "Skipperettes," a dozen women who qualified to sail the club's Fish Class boats under the tutelage of Sailing Master Bus Mabry. They were Kitty Morrison, Harriet Strum, Margaret Strum, Mary Cramer, Lois Foster, Jean Giedd, Dorothy Lee, Dot McQuillen, Barbara Schippert, Kay Bellerby and Mary Gray. At the time of the formation of the Salty Sisters, Betty Ann Rhodes and Jane Wray were among the women who had mastered the art of hoisting the heavy, gaff-rigged mainsail on a Fish Boat and sailing it solo.

The earliest racing took place in 8-foot Hagerty Sea Shell prams, which were later replaced by Clearwater Optimist Prams, and in the Fish Class sloops, later replaced by Rhodes 19 sloops. Throughout the years, the Salty Sisters have sailed Flying Juniors, O'Day Sprites, Flying Scots, Snipes, Sunfish, 420s, Ideals and Sonars. Spinnakers were first introduced with the Sprites.

The original group of 10 members quickly grew to about 150. Their success became so widespread that women from neighboring yacht clubs sought their help to organize similar groups within their own clubs. Soon there were the Tampa Yacht & CC "Main-sheet Mamas," Sarasota Sailing Squadron "Luffing Lassies," Clearwater YC "Windlasses," Davis Island YC "Dinghy Dames" and the Pass-a-Grille YC "Broad Reachers." Interclub regattas have continued through the years. These special one-day races are alternately hosted by the various sailing groups and perpetual trophies are awarded.

In the fall of 1973, Ardith Rutland held a meeting at her home with representatives of Tampa Y&CC, Pass-a-Grille YC, Treasure Island Tennis and YC, Sarasota Sailing Squadron, Clearwater YC and, of course, SPYC. They formed the Women's Interclub Council, later to become the Florida Women's Sailing Association, "to promote women's interclub racing in Florida, to improve communications among clubs and to seek uniformity of racing procedures." Salty Sister Fran Weaver-Nohren was elected first president.

FWSA sponsors two major regattas: the Championship Regatta for boats sailed with crew and the Rainbow Regatta for prams and pram masters. The



SPYC's Helen Larsen directs her crew during a race in 1996 while flying a Jolly Roger, which she raised as a playful intimidation tactic. "We are all very competitive," she told the photographer that day. STEPHANIE SINCLAIR / ST. PETERSBURG TIMES ARCHIVE

Salty Sisters have won trophies for the Rainbow Regatta and Championship Regatta several times. There is also an annual Spirit Award for the club with the best record of participation in interclub racing, won by the Salty Sisters on several occasions.

In 1958, the Salty Sisters sponsored a Mariner Girl Scout troop with Maggie McClure as adviser. Troop No. 630, named the S.S. Parker, had 24 girls, ages 14-17. For over three years the troop met on Monday afternoons at the Junior Yacht Club, now the St. Petersburg Sailing Center, to learn knots, seamanship, sailing and safety.

In 1961, the Salties inaugurated an annual summer series in a one-design class boat for junior girl sailors ages 9 to 21. A perpetual trophy was donated by Barbara Tolson Pardee and was known as the "Pardee Trophy."

In 1964, a British Royal Navy vessel came into port with a sailing team that promptly challenged the Salty Sisters to a three-race battle. It became a regular



Eleanor Ellis, left, Ruth Rifley, Dottie Lang and Joey Powell launch a Hagerty Sea Shell pram in the 1950s. RIFLEY COLLECTION

Salty Sisters



Toni Johnson rigs a Flying Junior in the 1960s. SPYC ARCHIVE



Salties rig Hagerty Sea Shells for a mid-day sail in 1953. SPYC ARCHIVE



A tradition: Lunching and sailing became a regular habit for the Salty Sisters. In 1952, at lunch were, from left, clockwise, Katie Kirk, Eleanor Ellis, Mary Lou Deuel, Lillian Rees, Bonnie Rowe, Ruth Rifley, Lois Emery, Dottie Lang, Fran Tolson, Cynthia Kaiser, Phyllis Shaver and Mabel Turner Easton. RIFLEY COLLECTION

event with each of Her Majesty’s naval vessels.

SPYC is known for the many prestigious regattas it hosts during the year. The Salty Sisters, from inception of the group, assisted with functions necessary to conduct a regatta such as registration, recording, scoring, press relations, housing, boat inspection and sail measurement and entertainment. Over time, they moved into the top race management roles.

In January 1987, the St. Petersburg Yacht Club hosted the USYRU Women’s National Championships. Nothing unusual by this time about the club hosting a national championship, except this time there was a difference: The Salty Sisters ran the show. Darlene Clark was regatta chairman, Maridell Weaver and Pat Seidenspinner were race committee chairmen for the two courses, and with the exception of a few males in secondary support positions, the Salties

did it all. USYRU asked to bring the championship back in 1988, to have the Salty Sisters do an encore, which they did.

Through the years, Salty Sisters have been recognized for their efforts, within and without the SPYC. Reba Fox, Dorothy Rhodes, Clark and Seidenspinner were each named honorary vice commodore of the International Thistle Class Association. Salty Sisters have held positions as race organizers, committee chairmen, members of the club’s executive committee, and members of the board of directors and, with the election of Seidenspinner in 2000, as commodore of the club. The Salty Sister captain has a permanent seat on the executive committee.

At the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, more than 20 Salty Sisters served on the race committee or did on-shore work at the sailing venue in Savannah, Ga.



Prams sail in the 2000 FWSA SS Rainbow Regatta. SPYC ARCHIVE



Harvey Parke in 1952. He was sailing master 1953-55 and coached Juniors and Salty Sisters. SPYC ARCHIVE

Seidenspinner, was the principal race officer for the Olympic Mistral Class course.

Spouses of Salty Sisters and an occasional stray male who regularly helps them are known as “Briny Brothers.” Many husband and wife teams are active in the club’s race management program. Periodically, Briny Brothers are invited to participate in “fun” race and social events. One unattached gentleman, so helpful and spry despite his 90-plus years, Quincy Tucker, was voted a Salty Sister life member.

In 2001, more than 200 Salty Sisters celebrated their 50th anniversary with a luncheon and a regatta. The anniversary “Fun Regatta” put more than 100 Salties on the water in 17 prams, four 420s, six Sonars, two Snipes, three spectator boats and three support boats. Salty Sister Barbara Arnold created quite a stir with her gift of a fly-by with a banner saying “Happy 50th



Bikini Cup racing: On the deck, from left, Lydia Johnson, Toni Johnson and Mary Ford watch Susie Johnson as she climbs the mast to adjust rigging for skipper Jean Irwin (not pictured) before the Bikini Cup races in 1970. RON PINNER / ST. PETERSBURG TIMES ARCHIVE

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The spinnaker she is trimming on a J24 reflects in Maridell Weaver’s sunglasses during a 1987 race. BARBARA WATSON CLAPP COLLECTION

From left, Mary Simmons, Adele Caldwell, Lucy Mangold and Betty Chase sail during the chilly 1972 Bikini Cup race. SPYC ARCHIVE



Anniversary Salty Sisters.” The race was covered by the local Fox television network affiliate, Channel 13. Salties received commemorative champagne glasses, charms, special regatta T-shirts, and had a group picture taken. There were memorabilia displays for every decade. The oldest Salty Sister, Priscilla Wardron, age 90+, celebrated on the water and at the luncheon. Mary Jane Misener, one of the 10 original Salties, also celebrated with the group. It was a great day of celebration for Salty Sisters.

Salties race out of the Sailing Center on Demen’s Landing every Wednesday morning, weather permitting. Lunch at the yacht club follows. In addition to serious racing, Salties occasionally have no-rules fun pram races including the Candy Cane Regatta, Christmas Tree Race, Poker Run and the “Mother Ducky” race.

When the weather is not favorable for sailing, or other regattas or circumstances prevent Salties from sailing, they retire to the classroom for education and training. These classes may include subjects such as racing rules, protests, tactics, how to rig a pram or 420, starting line strategy, how current affects the starting line and the meanings of flags. They also receive training in race management including timing for starts, using flags, reading wind direction, recording, course setting, learning the protocols of the signal boat and mark boat and receiving instruction on power-boating skills and knot tying.

New members are received once a year. Candidates go through an eight-week training program before initiation; those sessions are taught by Salty Sisters. Each new class has the dubious honor of providing the entertainment during the holiday luncheon in December. It has ranged from simple songs to major musical productions, all original and entertaining.

Notable sailing achievements by Salty Sisters include the first and only all-women’s team to sail in the Kahlua Cup. The Kahlua Cup was a grueling overnight race of more than 100 miles with historically challenging weather. The race of 1993 proved to be no exception – with winds up to 32 knots and one boat being dismasted. Of 95 boats entered in the race, 21 failed to finish. Our Salties skipper Margo Fischer and crew of Helen Larsen, Sandy Helsen, Fran Weaver-Nohren, T.J. Redderson and Barbara Cowan did finish, a remarkable achievement in itself. The Salty crew returned to compete in the Kahlua Cup in 1994, when they once again finished respectably.

Sailing in the Disabled Open Mid-Winter Regatta,



Sailing Master Dave Ellis conducts a capsizing drill with Salty Sisters, class of 1993. He was sailing master in 1986-1996. DAVE ELLIS COLLECTION



Helen Karan won the first Salty Sisters’ Grandmothers’ Race in 1990. The trophy was donated by Mary Simmons. SPYC ARCHIVE



The Salty Sisters take on Tampa Yacht and Country Club’s Mainsheet Mamas in an Optimist Pram race on the bay near the Bayfront Center in 1974. BOB HANNAH / ST. PETERSBURG TIMES ARCHIVE



Salties Char Doyle, from left, Juana Grover, Bojka Stan and Joyce Fraser race a J24 in the 1987 Bikini Cup races. *BARBARA WATSON CLAPP COLLECTION*



A patch commemorated the 50th year of the Salty Sisters.
SPYC ARCHIVE



Salties use the club Sonars in 2001.
CHAR DOYLE / SPYC ARCHIVE



Fay Baynard celebrates with champagne after winning the 10th Sandy Widener Wescott Trophy in 1990. *SPYC ARCHIVE*

Salty Jen French became a four-time winner of the Gruson-Milan Trophy for sailing performance as the top female skipper. French was also a member of the 2005 U.S. Disabled Sailing Team and represented the United States at the Paralympic Games.

Many of the group actively sail in regattas nationwide. Salty Sisters have participated in the U.S. Women's Sailing Championship Adams Cup. Our teams reached the finals three times, and were runners-up in 1993.

Salty Sisters also have a significant history of fun social events. The annual Welcome Back Party in the fall used to be celebrated at a member's home with a pot-luck luncheon and a case of champagne until 1999, when the size of the group necessitated a move to the ballroom in the clubhouse. Halloween also was celebrated in a big way with an evening party for Salties and their Brinys, which included outlandish costumes, dinner and dancing. The Halloween party has since become a part of the Wednesday luncheon, still including decorations and costumes. There is also a grand holiday luncheon in December as well as celebrations for other holidays throughout the year. The cruise chairman has organized "cruises" throughout the years with kayaking and canoeing, plays, movies, dinners, museum exhibits, various sports and tours of local interest.

Currently, the Salty Sisters sponsor the Allison Jolly Regatta for girls ages 8-18 in honor of Jolly who grew up sailing in the SPYC junior sailing program, where she won the Pardee Trophy three times. Jolly, currently the sailing coach at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, provides inspiration for all girls and women sailing at SPYC. Jolly was twice an Intercollegiate Sailing Champion, New York Yacht Club's Yachswoman of the Year and a U.S. gold medalist in the 1988 Olympic Games at Seoul, South Korea.

The Salty Sisters continue to be a vibrant force on and off the water at St. Petersburg Yacht Club.