Table of Contents

- President’s Message .............................................3
- From the Swim Commissioner ...............................4
- Swimmer of the Year ........................................5
- Swimming with the Fast Kids ...............................6
- Bali Ocean Swim ..............................................8
- Swim for Haiti ................................................9
- Swimming the Bay, 1960 to Today .......................11
- What Makes a Good Pilot ................................12
- Dreaded Ninth ..................................................13
- Peterson Regatta ...............................................14
- A Long-Awaited Launch ..................................16
- Boat Nights .......................................................17
- Shell Christening Ceremony ................................17
- Avoiding Rowing Injuries ................................18
- My Sea Lion Incident .......................................19
- SF Bay Pinnipeds ..............................................21
- St. Pat’s Handball Tournament ........................23
- 145th Annual St. Pat’s Luncheon .......................24
- Sturgeon: Quiet Giants of the Bay ....................25
- Membership Report ..........................................27

Cartoons: Victoria Dimitrakopoulos
Front Cover Photo: Alexander Lam
Back Cover Drone Photo: Allen Luong

The South Ender is the newsletter of the South End Rowing Club, published three to four times per year since 1931. We publish material by our members that reflects the ideals, purposes, and accomplishments of the South End.

It’s our members who make this newsletter, so send articles, short items, recipes, inappropriate jokes, and high-resolution photos to newsletter@serc.com. We reserve the right to edit all submitted material, but we’ll be nice about it, we promise.
Hello to my fellow South End Rowing Club members,
I write to you for the first time as the president of our
time as the president of our
fine club and to say what an honor it is to serve the
membership in this capacity.

I would like to personally thank my predecessor and
mentor Bill Wygant for directing the club through the
recent successful building work. We are in a great place
right now due in large part to Bill’s dedication and hard
work as president. When you see Bill at the club next, and
when you look around and see what a beautiful place we
all belong to, please go up and thank him. He was a big
part in making this happen.

My first dealings with the inner workings of the SERC
at the board level were last year as swim commissioner.

What struck me then was how much went on
behind the scenes to keep our club running. What a
lot of members don’t know is that we only have one
paid employee (the part-time office manager, Susan
Wintersteen) to manage a club of around 1,200 members.

Almost everything that is done at the club is done by
volunteers. We are now of the size that we need to act
like “professional volunteers” for the club to continue to
function. We are doing this—and I feel we are doing this
very well.

As I was celebrating the Life Membership of Annie King
Somerville at our board meeting recently I thought about
how this club attracts like-minded individuals.

There are members who like to come down for a casual
swim or row around the cove, do a run to the Golden Gate
Bridge, or play an occasional game of handball. There
are members for whom SERC is a home as they train for
marathon swims across the English Channel, row at the
Head of the Charles, run 100 miles across Death Valley, or
compete and win in national handball competitions. The
beauty of our club is that we are not only a sporting club:

We are a like-minded, tight-knit, supportive
community. So, as we move through 2018, and especially
for our newer members, please stop and say hello to
anyone you see at the club that you do not know. Ask
them how long they have been a member, ask them
which of the four sports they are involved with, and then
see if you can join them for a run, row, swim, or game of
handball. It is this openness and willingness to accept and
support each other that differentiates us from other clubs
or community groups.

Let’s make sure every member feels the community of
SERC.

Regards,

Simon
From the Swim Commissioner

By Kelley Prebil

I’m excited to be serving as your 2018 swim commissioner! I was born and raised on the Peninsula and never thought anyone swam in the bay or ocean here, as the water was too cold! I learned how to swim in 1979 at the tender age of 2. I joined my high school swim team only to get out of PE class and didn’t actually do much swimming.

I was inspired to swim again in 2011 when my physical therapist’s best friend, Jamie Patrick, was doing his 111-mile Sacramento River swim. I discovered that I was pretty good at distance as my regular daily workout set soon became 5,000 yards per day before work.

Jamie invited me to join his Lake Tahoe swim camp in 2013, where I did my first open water swim in Emerald Bay. I was hooked! I also met Evan Morrison that weekend. I thought he was nuts when he invited me to come swim with him at the club. But five months later, in January 2014, Suzie Dods showed me both clubs and took me on my first RTO (round trip opening). I fell in love with bay swimming as soon as I saw the Gate from the water. It’s still one of my favorite photos! Sighting off of the Transamerica Pyramid back to the club gave the city skyline a whole new meaning for me.

After hanging around the club for the first 24-Hour Relay, the South End just felt like home.

Since I started open water swimming in 2013, I’ve completed the Semana Nautica 10 km, Anacapa Island to mainland, and Catalina Island to mainland swims, in addition to making a few other marathon swim attempts (successful completions planned in my future!). I have about half a dozen other marathon swims planned for myself.

I’m a very active observer for both the Catalina Channel Swimming Federation and Lake Tahoe Marathon Swim Federation. It’s an incredible feeling to watch someone accomplish a dream that they worked for months to train and prepare for.

My goal as your swim commissioner is to make this program work for YOU. If you want to try to do a longer swim, a Nutcracker, or a marathon swim, I want to help you get the tools to make it happen. If you want to get more confidence on kayaking for swims then I want to help you with that also. Need help getting into piloting? Let me know and I’ll introduce you to a couple of our senior pilots. I can help you find crew for your marathon swim. I’m also happy to help if you want to learn how to direct one of our club swims or Nutcrackers.

We all have our own swim goals and none of them are too far-fetched or too modest (“I want to be able to swim once a week” is a perfectly valid goal). I enjoy helping people, which is why I volunteer so much at the club.

For my day job, I’m the senior database administrator at the California Academy of Sciences. Feel free to stop by and say hi to me if you’re there on a weekday. We also have some water-themed evening events that I try to let South Enders know about.

Please come introduce yourself to me at the club. I’m usually there in the early mornings (5 a.m.) and swim around 6/6:30 a.m. I’m always happy to have swim buddies!
Swimmer of the Year

By Ken Mignosa

It’s very early in the morning on 3 December, 2017, when I receive a text message from Cathy Harrington congratulating me on an award I’ve supposedly won at the South End’s annual end-of-year banquet.

At the time I thought she was just pulling my leg. But after a few swimmers congratulate me and Simon Dominguez hands me the 2017 Swimmer of the Year trophy, I know that that text message from Cathy was not a joke, and I feel humbled and grateful.

As Bill Wygant has pointed out, the South End is home to folks who win national and international rowing competitions, swim the English Channel, run the Dipsea Trail, win national handball championships, and perform all kinds of amazing athletic feats. Given the many accomplishments of South End members, how did I end up winning swimmer of the year? Compared to the Oceans 7, English Channel, Catalina Channel, Monterey Bay, and many other swims, my feats seemed pretty small.

Yes, I completed the length of Lake Tahoe, Catalina Channel, and Anacapa Island swims inside of about four months. Yes, I swam hundreds of hours in the lead-up to those swims in all kinds of conditions and temperatures, and in the process I racked up the most time in the Ice Cracker Challenge.

However, what makes the South End unique is that this impressive amount of swimming has been matched or surpassed by other South Enders. I am humbled to have been selected for the award from among a group of such accomplished swimmers.

I am grateful to the South End for making my long swimming possible. The South End gave me a place that I could just keep swimming, and it’s here that I met like-minded people. Late in 2015, when I started swimming at SERC, I got guidance from Chaz, Diana, Craig, Joe B., Jeff, Fran, Andrew, Todd, Bob, Kathy, Rebecca, Tom, Josh, El Sharko, Reptile, and others. From there, open water swimming became a passion.

Since early 2017 the majority of my swims have been measured in hours, and many were 10K or more. Sometimes I’d get toward the end of my available swim time near the dock, look at my GPS watch, and turn around and swim more to round it off to 10K (or 12K or even more). Sometimes GPS watches can provide too much information …

The majority of the time my swims haven’t ended because I was too sore, too hungry, or too tired. The swims have ended because I had somewhere else to be.

As I prepared for my marathon swims I had lots of questions. Here are a few:

• How do feeds work?
• What kinds of people might one want on a crew?
• How might I pace myself?
• What do I do if I get sore?
• What do I do if my feeds aren’t working?
• How do I let my crew know the plan for the swim?

Thankfully, there is a wealth of experience at the South End, and there are people who can answer these questions and more. I suppose I am now one of those people.

I’ve learned so much about myself in the process of doing lengthy open water swims. I’ve learned that I can persevere through long swims and difficult conditions. I’ve learned that I can work hard toward a difficult goal. Most importantly, I’ve learned that there’s help available, especially at SERC.

So for anyone now considering long swims, know that you are in the right place here at the South End, with the right people to help you learn about both yourself and marathon swimming.
Swimming with the Fast Kids

By Neil Heller

Sometimes I swim with my pod, the Peninsula Cove Chasers. Other times, I go on my own or join pods like the Sunrisers, who swim at 6:00am, or the Alcatraz Swim Society, the nicest ASSes anywhere. Although they swim too fast for me, the Night Train swimmers can turn ebbs into floods and floods into ebbs. Many other pods have formed at the South End. These include the B Team, Otters, North Beach Dads, Sea Nymphs, Nadadores Locos and the Irish. I see all pods as the anti-cliques—people sharing their passion for open water adventure.

And then there’s the early morning Friday Fast Kids. When they read this article, they will learn, for the first time, I think of them as the Fast Kids. While this story takes liberties, and exaggerates maybe just a bit, make no mistake about it: The Fast Kids are some of the nicest, most welcoming swimmers. Even if they are way too fast.

Please enjoy a glimpse into my world of pod hopping, pure joy, and endless laughter at the South End as you peruse these excerpts from my journal.

11/27/16
The Cove Chasers swam with the speedy Irish contingent. Actually, Vanessa and Tim swam with them. I got dropped.

12/14/16
The Night Train swimmers moved too quickly for my camera to focus and get a clear picture. They swam faster into the current than I swam with the current.

3/5/16
Successful Cove Chaser breakfast at the Blue Mermaid after a great swim with rough conditions in the wind and chop.

4/28/17
Those darn Fast Kids all made it to the Creakers. The Cove Chasers attempted an outside-outside before swimming in place for a few minutes at the elbow. Water was 53–55F and very brown/dirty.

5/27/17
The Cove Chasers battled a massive ebb. Given the very low tide, I walked to the Creakers on the inside while trying to keep up with the Fast Kids. No joy. Very fast float back on the outside with not much swimming required.

In the sauna, the Irish offered advice from their Bay Bridge test swim: “Get in the f@#king water and just swim.”

6/2/17
The Cove Chasers swam through the gap. Lots of swimmer traffic on West Main Street (the route to Ft. Mason). On the return to the cove, the Fast Kids approached us at high speed. I headed for shore and hid behind some swells to avoid an awkward encounter.

8/25/17
The Cove Chasers descended the stairs to arrive at the beach at 6:01 a.m. only to find the Fast Kids waiting for us. Yup, we had to face them on the beach, before the swim, armed with only our caps, goggles, and suits—our earplugs previously secured in the appropriate body cavities. Fortunately, the Fast Kids were smaller in numbers than usual. While they laughed and chatted, we snuck in the
water ahead of them, hoping to beat them out to the Creakers. It wasn’t meant to be. Instead, they went wide, heading out to the Creakers from far out at sea, while we stayed tight to the breakwater into the ebb.

We never saw them again.

9/22/17
Great conditions! The Cove Chasers snuck into the water as the Fast Kids laughed—presumably at us—and joked. We then made our way around the cove, avoiding East Main Street (the outside sea wall to the Creakers) where the Fast Kids would eventually congregate. The huge winter ebb river returned across the cove, creating a swirling challenge heading east to the opening from the Wedding Cake.

10/23/17
We expected a strong ebb, so the Sunrisers and I went clockwise around the cove. We extended the swim to view the Golden Gate Bridge. Much to our surprise, a cruise ship obstructed the GGB. The ship’s light glowed and illuminated the bay. I returned to the beach swimming sidestroke so I could appreciate the ship’s magnificence as it passed by the opening.

11/1/17
For the Cove Chasers who were ill, slept poorly, or otherwise incapacitated: It was a miserable swim. Please read no further.

For Cove Chasers who chose not to swim, went to work, or just flaked, this was probably the BEST SWIM EVER! We swam with the Sunrisers. After the ritual primal screams as the chilly waters first grabbed hold of us, we fought our way to the flag, and then through the goalposts, crabbing against the fierce flood. After hugging the pier and crashing into one another under cover of darkness, we regrouped outside the opening to experience the GGB in its full glory. As we swam back to the dock, the flood grabbed hold again and pressed us toward the Eppleton Hall and Thayer. An occasional Fast Kid swam an outside-inside not noticing much of the flood, if any at all. There was laughter on the beach, both before and after the swim—the joy of camaraderie and of equals having taken on adventure and succeeding together.

11/17/17
By the time we reached the opening, I had forgotten about the Fast Kids. Make no mistake, they showed up. They entered the locker room together, laughing as usual. It’s not like they greeted us by name, but they did look over in our general direction. Feeling a bit more confident than usual, we followed them down to the beach. They assembled at the center of the beach; we cautiously stayed to the right. We snuck in the water, hoping to avoid any incidents.

Hope was not enough. It was still a bit dark on the water when it happened. Right in front of the Jacuzzi, without any witnesses, one of the Fast Kids caught me and splashed me. Still shaking, I put my face back in the water and summoned all my courage to soldier on.

The rest of the pod was waiting at the opening. Seeing their joyful expressions was enough to put me at ease and allow me to bury the memory of what had just happened.

11/18/17
We won the tri by two points!
Everyone showed up—rowers, runners, and swimmers. Piloting a RIB gave me a front-row seat to admire and be proud of our Fast Kids and all the other pods. Everyone was my friend today. Let’s see what happens next Friday when the Fast Kids return to the beach.
Earlier this year, my fiancée and I took a trip to Bali. Since she was doing some yoga while she was there, she suggested that I look into open water swimming. It had not occurred to me, but sure enough, there was an event called the Bali Ocean Swim, a fundraiser for swim programs for people with disabilities. Great, sign me up!

The event had the option for a 1.2k, 5k, or 10k swim. I figured I could do 10k, but that’s the sort of distance that would be a bit more effort than I felt like for vacation, and 1.2k seemed too short. 5k sounded perfect!

I arrived at the host hotel on the day of the swim, checked in, and listened to the swim briefing, in Indonesian and in English, for the mixed pack of locals and tourists. The Indonesian organizer said that the locals might find the water a bit colder than they were expecting. Oh? After the briefing, and after doing a bit of calculating to translate temperatures into Celsius, I asked him what the water temperature was. 25 Celsius (77 Fahrenheit). Cold? I told him that I regularly swim in water more like 15 Celsius (59 Fahrenheit)—if we’re lucky. His response: “Man, that is frickin’ cold!” No kidding, buddy!

The course was to swim out to a boat, cut a right, then swim down a line of buoys until the turnaround point, which doubled as a water station, then head back the way you came. And then double that if you are doing the 10k.

Each distance had a different colored cap: 10k had green, 5k had red, and 1.2k had white. The 10k swimmers started first, then 30 minutes later, the 5k swimmers, then another 30 minutes later, the 1.2k.

Looking at the times from 2016, I saw that the 3rd place time in my age/gender division was 1:44:44, which seemed like a time that I could legitimately handle. Could I possibly even place? I could never place like that at a SERC swim, but here, maybe I had a chance. So I started the swim with a bit of excitement.

The swim was a fun one: pleasantly warm water, not too choppy, nice day, and a pretty straight shot. I got to the turnaround point, had a bottle of water and some Gu, then plugged ahead and finished in about 1:43:22.

I have no idea what changed between 2016 and 2017, but that was nowhere near good enough to place in my age group. In fact, I finished second to last in my division (10th out of 11). Maybe the previous year, word had not gotten out to fast swimmers, but they certainly showed up in force this year. As I was nearing the end, I had some green-capped 10k swimmers burn past me at a blinding speed, despite having swum for almost 10k at that point.

So while I may not have placed, I did have a good day of open water swimming while repping SERC in the international waters. If you ever happen to be in Bali in early July, I recommend giving it a try. And I look forward to seeing what other open water swim events I can find the next time I travel.
Our hotel is the Oloffson, a former gingerbread mansion built by one of Haiti’s presidents in the early 1900s. Though once a grand dame, it now looks simultaneously like a 90-year-old hooker desperately trying to cling to her former glory and a drowning victim rapidly going down for the last time. But many luminaries have stayed here, and the rooms are named after various guests: Kristine gets the Susan Sarandon room and Peg and I get the Jackson Browne room (coincidentally my favorite musician).

After we settle in, we head back to the open air veranda, have a late lunch, and then sample the Oloffson’s famed, potent rum punches. After three or four, Kristine says, “I think I need to go to my room.” And Peg later says Kristine’s words are the last thing she remembers about the day. As for Kristine, she says the next morning when she awoke the room was in complete disarray, paintings on the wall tilted, clothes and towels on the floor, and sheets in a tangle. Remarkably, no one is hung over.

Swim for Haiti is organized by SwimTrek and sponsored by Watering Minds, a nonprofit that supplies clean drinking water for schoolchildren. The proceeds from the event help fund Watering Minds as well as efforts to teach children the fundamentals of swimming (less than 1 percent of the population can swim—astounding for an island with 1,100 miles of coastline). And, we’re honored to meet and have a cocktail with Haiti’s first female Olympic swimmer, Naomy Grand’Pierre, and Watering Minds director Jim Chu.

After two days of sightseeing the big day arrives and we board the boat taking us out to the Iles des Arcadins, which is just three small sandbar spits. It’s a small group—only 23—and each of us will have a personal paddler: local fishermen who have rowed out from the mainland in dug-out canoes and boats to escort us. I guess it’s me but on the boat ride out I’m amazed how people are chatting idly and socializing while I’ve got my game face on. I’m reviewing my normal swim strategy and looking back to shore for potential landmarks to sight on. I find a couple of perfect ones up on top of the deforested mountaintops.

After our 30-minute boat ride, we arrive at Iles des Arcadins and are assigned our pilots. Mine speaks no English and I speak no Creole. I’ve set a timer on my watch to go off every 25 minutes so I’ll know when to feed. The air horn signals the start of the swim and we’re off. I’m to the left of the pilot but find myself staring straight into the sun. I switch to the right. Then he’s in front of me, then he’s in back of me, then he’s to my right. I’m so focused on determining where we are in relation to each other that the “zone” proves elusive.
As we leave the sandspit I also note we’re moving at a glacial pace, lending credence to my belief we are swimming into a current. After what seems like an eternity I look at my watch: 37 minutes have elapsed, yet I’ve not heard the alarm. I feed and continue. Unaware of time, I stop for my next feed, but it’s only been 17 minutes.

The mental aspect of any physical endeavor is the most critical, so for this swim my training has focused heavily on mindfulness. Unfortunately, with the barrage of distractions, I’m overloaded and unable get into any meditative zone state. I think you know the outcome: I eventually pull myself, unable to focus on the swim and derailed by the distractions.

Meanwhile, Kristine is battling against the current and finishes five minutes ahead of the five-hour cutoff. Like Kristine, the Haitian people are strong-willed and driven. With no infrastructure, and exacerbated by the devastating 2010 earthquake that killed between 250,000 and 300,000 people, you either make a living or you die. Some estimates place the unemployment rate at 60 percent. But that’s just looking at traditional jobs. Lining the streets of Port-au-Prince are thousands and thousands and thousands (no exaggeration) of tiny stalls, cheek to jowl, selling everything you can imagine. There are no Kmart, no grocery stores, no department stores, few restaurants.

Everything you need is sold in these street stalls. It truly is amazing to see the level of micro-entrepreneurship. Despite the public perception by some of this country’s leaders that Haitians are less-than-desirable immigrants, my perception is quite the opposite. Haitians have a hunger, a fire, and a desire to build a better life for themselves. They hustle every day to stay alive. Isn’t this the kind of go-get-’em spirit we want in immigrants?

I could have used a massive infusion of this fortitude in my swim.
The picture above shows me and my sister Pam at the Marina Green in 1963. Pam was a member of SERC in the early ’80s. The beach was oil- and gas-soaked and garbage was afloat, but it did not stop us from playing in it. We really did not notice! I guess we got inoculated early, as my parents would cover us in baby oil and we’d spend many a day, fog or sun, playing at the Green.

Kelly’s Cove, Sloat beach, Fort Funston, Thornton Beach, Land’s End, Mussel Rock, China Beach, Baker Beach, the Marina Green, Richardson Bay, McNears, Kirby Cove, Point Bonita, Linda Mar, Dillon Beach, Stinson Beach, Bolinas, Point Reyes, Inverness, Jenner, Muir Beach, Rio Nido … all of these were a playground of ocean bliss.

At Ocean Beach at high tide the city would release raw sewage … the smell was ripe, but you could get half a pie and glass of milk at the Pie House, a tamale smothered in onions at the Hot House, and an It’s-It at Playland across the street, so I guess that made it all right!

I lived at Kelly’s Cove growing up. At low tide, parts of the old pier would jut out of the water. A couple friends of mine got nicked a few times when they were not paying attention to the current. Hell, Seal Rock actually had a few seals!

As a kid my dad and I would dump our garbage down by where Candlestick Park used to be or thereabouts … we would just back up our station wagon and throw all our garbage in. Big tractors would push it away and old Italian dudes would pick through it.

There is a good documentary called Saving the Bay (http://savingthebay.org/) that gives a good history of the bay and an overview of how people used to use the bay as a dumping ground, and how that started to change. Three women—Catherine Kerr, Sylvia McLaughlin, and Esther
For me a good pilot is someone who can see a bigger picture, plays well with others, never wants to stop learning, and is calm under pressure. In my experience, yelling into the radio does not help solve problems, but a cool and calm head does. I would also add “Ever vigilant, ever paranoid.” That is to say, a good pilot is someone who takes things seriously and never stops trying to anticipate dangers to swims.

With all that said, and I have heard this time and time again, being a pilot makes you a better swimmer. If nothing else, you will understand better why a pilot might be directing you out of the way of a tanker when all you can see is clear water ahead.

So if you’re a serious swimmer, your next move should be to jump in a boat and start learning how to pilot. You will be giving back to the club that makes these awesome swims possible. And piloting is not only driving inflatables. Kayakers, rowers, SUPs, etc.—they all really help make our swim coverage better. Many eyes on the water make for a safer swim.

And that is the never-ending goal: to keep these swims safe. Because we want to meet you back in the Cook Shack and swap stories with you about our latest adventures.

**How Piloting Fits into a Swim**

Race director: The easiest way to break this down is that the race director oversees the swim until the swimmers hit the water and the yellow and red flags go up.

Lead pilot: Once the swimmers are in the water, it is the lead pilot’s swim. Obviously it is best if they work together, but it is the lead pilot’s final call once the swimmers are in the water.

Because life is quirky at best, sometimes the race director can be the lead pilot too … ain’t life grand?

---

**CONGRATULATIONS NEWLY PROMOTED PILOTS**

Kelley Prebil : Accompanying Pilot
Sarah Roberts: Accompanying Pilot

---

What Makes a Good Pilot?

**By Jim Bock**

For me a good pilot is someone who can see a bigger picture, plays well with others, never wants to stop learning, and is calm under pressure. In my experience, yelling into the radio does not help solve problems, but a cool and calm head does. I would also add “Ever vigilant, ever paranoid.”

That is to say, a good pilot is someone who takes things seriously and never stops trying to anticipate dangers to swims.

With all that said, and I have heard this time and time again, being a pilot makes you a better swimmer. If nothing else, you will understand better why a pilot might be directing you out of the way of a tanker when all you can see is clear water ahead.
I had literally been a member of SERC for nine short days when I turned up at 5:30 a.m. on February 9 to meet Bob Roper and put my name on the list as a starter. With some previous experience in cold water swimming, I figured I could make the swim. But having just left the warm waters of Bondi Beach (80°F) in Sydney to arrive at a chilly (50°F) Aquatic Park, I knew I was in for an additional personal challenge.

Thankfully the weather gods looked favorably upon us on this “dreaded” morning and the waters were reasonably calm and there was no rain in sight.

Having not timed myself doing a cove I had no idea where exactly I should start, so I picked the safe option of the middle of three groups. What an awesome team they were! Club President Simon introduced me to a few of the members and asked them to look after me and make sure I understood what was going on. Many thanks to Zach and Neil and everyone else who made me feel so welcome that morning.

After the briefing we headed down to the dock and loaded into the boats with our pilots and off we went. This was a truly magical moment: sitting in a rubber ducky (as we call them in Australia) with the sun rising over the water and seeing the city from the water. I pinched myself. This was the moment I realized that I now live here in this gorgeous city!

When we arrived at AT&T Park, all swimmers joined the big white boat and we all huddled around in minimal clothing trying to keep warm. When all paddlers and pilots were in place and ready, the first group hit the water. There was cheering and a few squeals as the icy water engulfed them. The middle group was next. We posed for a quick team photo then over we went into the icy waters.

Our paddlers quickly assembled around us and our group stuck together beautifully. As we swam under the Bay Bridge I rolled on my back and swam backstroke. It was really an amazing view and feeling.

Onwards we swam, passing by the stunning San Francisco sights and piers. Being a left-hand breather, this swim was absolutely perfect from a sightseeing perspective. Thankfully we had no crossovers with any ferries even though it was peak hour for commuters. The current was supporting all the swimmers nicely and we were holding a nice pace together for the majority of the swim.

Once past the danger zone of the ferries, we picked up the pace and headed home to SERC. By this stage, we were at 75 minutes of swim time and I was starting to really feel the cold, so I joined the fast kids who were swimming past me at this stage and headed to the finish. All I could think about for the last 15 minutes was how much I could not wait to get in that sauna!

After defrosting, I headed down to the cook shack where the most amazing breakfast prepared by Al Jaurique and Betty Jean awaited. This was the most awesome surprise to a new member. Sitting around eating breakfast and chatting about the swim with all the participants was a truly special time. I felt so welcomed by the SERC community and so thankful to all the support crew who made it possible.

The Dreaded Ninth was nothing but awesome, and I can’t wait for the next club swim!
Rainy skies cleared and the water calmed for the annual Norm Petersen regatta. For many years this race has served as the season opener.

The first big event of any sporting season carries with it a heightened level of excitement as everyone gets a chance to size up the competition and set goals for the year. Setting goals often follows moments of inspiration. With inspiration comes a license to dream big and think on a scale that was terrifying just moments prior. Anything feels possible.

Defining a legend

We use the word “legend” fairly loosely these days. After speaking with South Enders during his namesake regatta, it became clear that Norm Petersen set the bar impossibly high.

Two stories stuck out in a sea of impossible feats. One involves a Catalina crossing. The weather was so bad that the Hurley took on huge amounts of water over the gunnels, and it had to be bailed in a constant rotation.

About halfway across what would be a 12-hour crossing, a massive wave broke over the boat delivering a huge fish that began flapping around in the hull. Everyone went to throw it back to sea until Norm screamed over the howling wind, “Keep the fish! We might need it.”

When they finally made it to Catalina well past their projected landing time, everything was closed. Norm talked his way into a closed restaurant, carrying the fish straight to the kitchen. Hearing the tale, the chef immediately turned the fish into a massive feast for the famished crew.

At least that is how the story has evolved over the years. The tall tale is so fun that it’s hard to be disappointed when Daniel Marshall explains that the giant fish was actually a bunch of tiny herring no bigger than one’s hand.

One of Norm’s closest brushes with death happened when crossing into Mexican waters with a drunk captain. In rough seas, Norm went overboard, but the boat kept going. When he hit the water Norm took his jeans off and inflated them to serve as a life jacket to buy time while he decided which way to start swimming. Three hours went by before an Italian navy ship spotted his regular splashing and odd pace on the horizon.

A father-daughter bond

Norm’s daughter, Jan Petersen Forni, has some tales too.

From speaking with Jan, it became clear that they had a close bond. Over the years she tried to meet his superhuman standards by doing terrifying physical feats to prove her strength. One such endeavor left her floating on a log in complete exhaustion somewhere off the coast of China Camp. She cried from the pain and emptiness associated with letting her father down. In a moment of total redemption he came up to her with a smile and said, “You just experienced a seven-foot tide!” Gosh knows how long he let her fight it, knowing a successful crossing was out of grasp.

At 38, she finally crossed from shore to shore under the Golden Gate Bridge to complete a lifelong challenge her dad set for her.

Norm at the South End

Jan shared that people called Norm “Tomahawk” because he would lift an entire sheet of drywall with one hand while using the other to nail it in place. He leveraged this tireless energy in service to the club every year by sanding and varnishing the entire floor by hand—over the span of one weekend. When women were finally accepted into the club, he used his construction knowledge to play an instrumental role designing and building the original women’s locker room and sauna.

Norm’s service to the club did not stop there. He mentored countless female rowers in the program, often making everyone show him their hands to determine whether they were rowing hard enough.
Norm raced in his namesake regatta many times before he died. Always up for a little extra excitement, he turned toward Bravo tower early one year, causing a stir as the shore team searched for him in the choppy waters.

On his 80th birthday they named a boat in his honor, which was rowed proudly by Vanessa Blyth-Gaeta and Jessica Gammel, who brought home the gold in this year’s regatta.

**Sparking tradition**

For many of us, the New Year’s Day swim is a special start to the new year. The air feels electric as we all shake off the tiredness and various states of hangover to brave the cold for an Alcatraz crossing. We can all thank Norm, Tim Rice, George Farnsworth, and Frank Coghlan who started the swim as a personal tradition that gained momentum over the years.

Like so many of the club’s traditions, it started as a small group doing what they loved. This should make us all pause to think about what traditions will be started in our generation. What great feats will our swimming and rowing colleagues dream up and execute?

Legends before us brought a sense of adventure and sport to the forefront and exceeded what came before them. They kept their feet on the gas pedal for many many decades, breaking through personal limits and pushing others to do the same. It is our job to preserve these stories and make new ones to inspire another generation of inspiration seekers.

The South End Rowing Club draws people through its doors for adventure, community, athleticism, challenge, and personal growth. For Norm, it was his home and it was his family. The bonds he made at the club have lasted for over 60 years. Behind his warm personality was a man who never sat still and thrived from challenging himself and constantly pushing everyone around him to do the same. If things looked really bad and most of the fleet dropped out, or if the swim got cancelled, Norm kicked into high gear.

Norm was a true South Ender and will continue to inspire us all to to push our own limits, defy the odds, and inspire our community.
It has been a whirlwind of new energy in the rowing program this year. We’ve restarted monthly rowers’ meetings to keep the communication lines flowing within the program, and we have had monthly informal workshops building the skills of many South Enders. We’ve completed our first row (the Krispy Kreme) and our first regatta (the Norm Petersen) to smashing successes.

The Norm Petersen Regatta on March 25th had a huge turnout with many first-time South Enders rowing in the event. It was probably the largest regatta we’ve had at the South End in a long time.

Equally successful was the Krispy Kreme Row on March 11th. We were worried that the wind and weather would not cooperate … but they did! However, we were presented with thick fog instead. Rather than cancel the row, we creeped in a downsized fleet along the waterfront to enjoy breakfast near our ancestral home of South Beach.

Keep the energy going, and keep in swing.
—Un Gato Tuxedo

Good things happen to those who wait. If that’s true, the South End Rowing Club will have a very good thing happen in a few weeks. The club’s longest project, the restoration of our eponymous boat, the South End barge, will be soft launched on March 22nd. This restoration has taken around 12 years from start to finish.

The South End owes her condition today to Wayne Buford who saved her from being sawed in half in the 1960s, and to Dan McLaughlin, who began the project and led it for 10 years, and to all the past and present volunteers who put in hundreds of hours in restoring this boat. I’m honored to be the one to carry this project to completion.

I’m writing this on the March 12th without knowing the future, as our editor, Dylan Tweney, has a deadline and won’t wait 12 years for me to finish writing this article. However, you readers will know how the launch went. Did it go well?

Did she break in half? How much water did she take on? (I do expect that as the planking needs to swell to get waterproof.) Were we able to put a crew in and row around the cove?

Did the spirits of all who rowed her since 1915 scream “IT’S ABOUT DAMN TIME!!”?

If all goes well, and I expect it to, we’ll have “sea trials”—aka work out the kinks, make adjustments, learn to row the boat—and later, we’ll have a proper club christening, with champagne and a party to kick off her next 100 years.

Note from the Rowing Commissioner

By Oliver Gajda

A Long-Awaited Launch

By Cy Lo

Al Lapp & Joe Amato weld the SE Dolly
Boat Night

By Cy Lo

Boat Night has been the place to be on Thursday evenings. We’ve got a growing cadre of volunteers working on the boats, which has enabled members to swarm a boat and paint/varnish it in an evening or two.

We’ve got our long-term projects, the Murphy and the Lawley, which are making headway. Some overdue boats like the Valkyrie will be varnished and returned to the floating fleet soon, and one long-overdue boat, the South End barge, will make its presence in the bay again.

Not only are the boats improving, the skills of the volunteers are improving as well. People are learning skills they wouldn’t use in their “outside the cove” lives.

It’s heartening to watch the activity at Boat Night, to see groups of people working together skillfully with confidence, pride, and love for our boats of the South End.

If you’re new to the club or to rowing, Boat Night is often a great shortcut to finding a rowing mentor or a partner. It isn’t necessary to do this, but it doesn’t hurt, and you’ll appreciate the amount of work it takes to keep the fleet afloat.

Finally, we’ve got a great family-style dinner at the end of each session, and the food is always spectacular and tasty.

Though we like skilled woodworkers or painters, I just require enthusiasm and flexibility to do anything that needs to be done. And if you want to cook, we certainly do appreciate cooks!

Shell Christening Ceremony

By Cy Lo and Pauline Yeckley

The club’s two new shells, the Queenie Moon and the Diane Davis, were christened at a ceremony on Sunday, February 4, 2018.

The names were voted upon at the rower’s meeting.

The Diane Davis is to honor the achievements and coaching of Head of the Charles champion/record holder Diane Davis. The other, the Queenie Moon, is to honor one of the early South End’s women, Joan Mankin. Joan, the late wife of Dan Macchiarini, performed as a clown in the Pickle Family Circus under the stage name Queenie Moon.

A gathering of friends, family, and South Enders came together to celebrate the occasion. Prosecco was poured over the boats and then both shells were taken out for “maiden voyages” on the cove by Diane and Janie Bryant, former rowing commissioner and head fundraiser for the boats.

It was a beautiful sunny day with no wind.
Managing Rowing Injuries Before They Start

By Kim Peirano

As I’ve ventured into the world of open water rowing at the South End, I’m quickly learning many of the possible points of injury for rowers, myself included. While rowing is a low-impact sport, posture and positioning are extremely important. Overtraining can also quickly lead to injury. We also have the added hazards of getting our beautiful wooden boats in and out of the water, and that good ol’ dock crank.

As an acupuncturist who commonly treats patients for pain related to athletic endeavors, I can say that taking care of an injury when it first appears is crucial. When issues are in the acute phase, they are generally easier and faster to treat.

Common Rowing Injuries

Injury from rowing is commonplace. One study of senior international rowers found that the prevalence of injury was 0.92 injuries per rower, which can make it seem like injury is essentially guaranteed at some point or another.

Most injuries occur due to overuse and overtraining. In addition, making changes to the type of boat one rows or making significant changes to the routine like changing sides mid-season can be an entry point for a new injury.

The good news is most rowing injuries tend to be minor. The most common are lower back injury and knee injury. A new rower with a history of these types of injuries may be more susceptible to re-injury due to rowing, in which case a slow training regimen with emphasis on proper technique will be crucial.

Other injuries include the wrist, mostly due to the repeated motion of feathering the oars; the rib cage, shoulder, and arm; and occasionally neck and back strain. Being acutely aware of our bodies while participating in any sport is essential. If something feels ‘off’ we can correct course and heal the injury in its initial phases.

Exercises to Prevent Injury

One great way to help prevent injury is to strengthen our weaknesses, and also to take it easy when we feel like an injury may be developing.

Good Posture on the Erg

One of the most important ways you can spend your time training is making sure you’re getting good posture and a good, efficient stroke on the erg. Not sure what that looks like? Ask an advanced rower! We have plenty of ex-collegiate rowers in the South End who can help you. There are also plenty of videos on YouTube.

Knee Strength

If you’re feeling some knee pain after a row it’s important to take that as your body’s HUGE warning signal and address it right away. Some exercises and stretches to help with patellar knee pain are:
- Straight Leg Raises - Wall Slide (or wall assisted squat)
- External Hip Rotation - Iliotibial Band and Buttock Stretch
- Hamstring and Calf Stretches

Lower Back Care

Those prone to low back pain might notice this pain spot lighting up after rowing. Problems can be caused by hunching over, pulling with the arms instead of pushing with the legs, and failing to keep those shoulder blades down.

Getting someone to critique your stroke on the erg will be very helpful, as will these exercises and stretches:
- Planks - Back Extensions - Swiss Ball Pikes (Google this one!)
- Reverse Hip Raises - Knee to Chest Stretch - Lying Knee Twist - Yoga Cat / Cow Position - Piriformis Stretch / Seated Twist

Alternative Therapies

There are many options for alternative therapies and treatments to help speed recovery, or even to prevent injury in the first place. Acupuncture, chiropractic (for more than just the back!), physical therapy, working with a trainer, massage, cupping, myofascial release, trigger point therapy, shiatsu, tui na, energy healing (reiki), and nutritionists can all be very useful. Many professional sports teams, and even the
My Sea Lion Incident

By Rick Mulvihill

After much talk with other members around 7:15 a.m. on December 15, 2017, I decided to swim despite the sea lion attack on Christian Enfield out by the Creakers the day before. I planned to swim conservatively, and refrain from swimming out of the cove.

I almost always swim alone, have gone pretty much wherever I please, and have felt very comfortable with the freedom of swimming in Aquatic Park and SF Bay. I can’t speak for the other swimmers who were attacked by sea mammals during this period, but I had become complacent about the dangers that we face, and that was a mistake.

South Enders and all open water swimmers must all remember that this is a dangerous sport, we need to be as safe as possible, and careful judgment should be exercised at all times. Otherwise you can get in trouble like I did.

I swam up to the Jacuzzi to take a look at the mistletoe someone had hung under it. Then I started towards the opening, along the eastern wall. That is when I was rammed and bitten by something simultaneously. The ramming felt like getting sideswiped by a car, and the bite was a huge clamp down that I knew right away had done some serious damage. I did not see what attacked me because I immediately began to swim away.

The animal hit and bit me from underneath in my right lower abdomen area, just above and to the side of my private parts. The force was significant and the bite was very hard. It surprised and shocked me. I was in a meditative mind space before the attack and then, in a flash, I had to protect myself.

Once I regained focus I applied pressure from my right hand to the wound, flipped onto my back and started swimming one-arm backstroke as hard as I could, and hoped the animal wouldn’t come back to bite me again.

Lucky for me, it didn’t. I realized this might be my most important swim. I concentrated hard and dug in because I knew I could swim to shore faster than yelling for help and waiting for assistance. My thoughts were all about getting to shore before I lost consciousness due to shock or loss of blood. The swim itself probably took 10 minutes, during which I was in total survival mode.

When I got to the beach I was physically assisted by Joe Boone, while Carol Merryfield called 911. Bobby Tandler, Tim Mooney, Bob Roper, Andrew Burrell, and several others also assisted me. I was very lucky to have so much help.

Once I was in the ambulance they cut my suit off, took off my coat, and threw a thin blanket over me. I was as cold and hypothermic as I have ever been. Because blood
loss was a big concern they kept me cold the whole way to the Zuckerberg SF General Hospital to slow the bleeding. Another concern was shock, so Nick the EMT talked to me the entire time to keep me conscious. Thanks to the EMTs for such great professional care.

At the hospital’s trauma center I was given world-class care, and got my wounds cleaned, treated, and sutured. Animal control had ordered a rabies protocol, which was administered. I was very well taken care of, and I’d like to give everyone who worked on me a huge shout out.

In the end I had three deep gashes—three, four, and six inches long—and luckily they didn’t cut through any muscles, or the vital veins or arteries in that area. The trauma team told me later that my wounds resemble pictures they had of other sea lion bites. I was very lucky that the spot that was hit was away from more delicate areas, that the bite wasn’t deeper, and that the animal didn’t complete the bite.

A few days later I heard that there were two SERC swimmers in the area at the time of my attack who witnessed a sea lion swimming away from me. They had also heard me scream, but then saw me swim away, and thought all was well.

After a six-week recovery period, Irene Chan (who was bitten in a separate incident in December) and I returned to the water on January 28, 2018. It was the first time either of us had returned to swimming in Aquatic Park since we were attacked. Irene and I were surrounded by a safety pod of 40 swim “angels” organized by Joe Boone. All of us swam to the wedding cake area of Muni Pier and back. It was a short but important swim. I was a bit frightened to go back into the bay, but being in such company put my fears to rest.

I tell people who ask me how I feel about swimming after my attack that “I am not unscathed, I am still a bit gun-shy, but open water swimming is what I do, and I am getting more comfortable as time passes.”

What I’ve Learned

After watching the Academy of Science and Marine Mammal Center presentations, reading documented reports of attacks and bites occurring on the West Coast going back to 2000, and talking to many well-informed folks, a few things seem clear to me.

We share space with these big and powerful animals. I believe I was run over by this sea lion due to being in close quarters next to the breakwater wall. I was rammed and bitten so the sea lion could get where he wanted.

The breakwater is part of the sea lion’s domain, and some experts even refer to it as “the sea lion superhighway.” I would strongly advise swimming with a partner or a close pod in this area.

If you do come into contact with a sea lion or harbor seal swim away from him as quickly as possible, don’t engage with him at all, and give a heads up to other swimmers in the area if possible.

Thanks to everyone for all the support, best wishes, and communications. The SERC is the best. Please swim safe.
San Francisco Bay Pinnipeds

By Kelley Prebil

Jack Dumbacher, a fellow South Ender and chairman of the Ornithology and Mammology Department at the California Academy of Sciences, and Sue Pemberton, a curatorial assistant at the Academy who has worked exclusively with pinnipeds for 20+ years, came to the club on Saturday, January 27, to present a very informative lecture on the pinnipeds found in the San Francisco Bay and explore the possibilities on why people get bit while swimming.

Sue and Jack did a fantastic job of providing the information clearly, and hopefully cleared up a lot of questions people had about pinniped behavior. A very important fact to remember is that they are wild animals and should be treated with respect.

Below is a summary of what they discussed in the form of brief notes, as they covered a lot of information in two hours.

**Six types of pinnipeds in and around the San Francisco Bay:**

* Four types are family Otariidae (“eared seals”):
  * Guadalupe fur seal, northern fur seal, Steller sea lion, California sea lion
    * Feed above water
    * No nails on front flippers
    * External ears
    * Propulsion by front flippers, which can be rotated to walk on land
* Two types are family Phocidae (“true seals”):
  * Harbor seal, northern elephant seal
    * Feed underwater
    * Nails on front flippers
    * Internal ears
    * Short muzzle and fur
    * Inch along on tummies when on land
* Normal behavior is they are very passive around humans

**Their personalities are as distinctly different from each other as those of humans**

**Biting people:**

* Historically, on average, two people get bit in and around Aquatic Park every year!
* Can’t say whether it was the same pinniped that bit three people in and around the breakwater without visual or DNA match.
* Can’t say whether a dead pinniped found elsewhere in the bay is the same one that bit people in Aquatic Park.
* Irene’s bite marks clearly matched the jaws of a harbor seal.
* These were “warning” bites, as their jaws are powerful enough to have crushed a knee or do more serious damage.

**Possibilities as to why people get bit by pinnipeds in Aquatic Park:**

* Herring Run: Herring run every year, and they had been running for two months before the bites, so they ruled this out.
* Mistaking people (swimsuits) for fish: Pinnipeds are colorblind; eat small fish, squid (favorite!), and octopus whole; larger fish are bit HARD and they shake the larger fish to rip off a chunk. No documentation of a pinniped trying to
eat humans.

* Sickness/Injury: Includes domoic acid poisoning, shark bites, propeller wounds, marine debris, entanglement, broken bones, bacterial infections, tumors/cancer, etc. This is a possible cause, but without having the actual animal and/or a DNA swab, it’s hard to determine. No known confirmed cases of rabies; those with domoic acid poisoning die within a couple of days.

* Protecting harem (female pinnipeds): Only happens during mating season (June and July); only on land; 95 percent of the sea lions at Pier 39 are male! They never mate there either.

* Protecting pups: Females only care for the pups for six weeks after giving birth (May–August for “eared seals,” March/April for harbor seal, December–March for elephant seals); males don’t care for the pups. The nearest rookery (birthing location) is in Sausalito and the Richmond Bridge. Females are not aggressive and are more likely to run away from you; they protect pups directly around the rookery; after six weeks the pups are on their own.

* Fishermen throwing fish waste or leftover bait into the water: Possible but can’t say for certain without knowing what else is in the water at the time someone was bit; they definitely go crazy for squid, which is sometimes used by fishermen as fish bait.

* Protecting territory: They only protect land territory and not water territory; Pier 39 is too far away for them to be doing that anyway; more territorial around rookeries and not in “haul out” areas.

* Trying to colonize Aquatic Park: No. There isn’t really anywhere for them in AP to colonize.

* Playing with us or otherwise saying hi: Probably not, as they’re pretty skittish by nature.

* AP is part of a “pinniped superhighway”: We are in it but there isn’t enough interaction data to say if this is for certain a factor.

What to do if someone is bit:

* Call 911!

* Get the person out of the water and warmed up (whatever method they prefer: sauna, shower).

* Apply pressure to control the bleeding.

* Wash the wound with soap and water.

* ALL pinniped (or suspected pinniped) bites should be treated as if they are infected with mycobacteria, vibrio, or ureasplasma. Doxycycline is the antibiotic of choice.

* DO NOT go beyond your first aid training level and let the paramedics take over when they get to the club.
Rain and grey skies did not dampen the players’ enthusiasm for the St. Paddy’s Day tournament on March 16th, which brought the chance to compete against players from surrounding areas. Handballers and swimmers gathered together in the sauna to warm up hands, gloves, and the lobster-red skin of swimmers who had jumped in the waters for swims ranging from 15 minutes to a little over an hour (with no wetsuits!). On Sunday we were joined by powerful-looking young men who fought a four-alarm fire throughout the night. They enjoyed watching the Open players, and are motivated to work on their own games—the next generation!

**Men’s Opens:**

In the semis, Erik Torres and Marc Tobin battled the tough San Jose team of Salvadore “Chava” Oscalon/Arturo “Lefty” Suarez. Erik simply overwhelmed Lefty with power, and had good returns off of Chava’s sharp reverse serves.

Mike McDonald/Lennart De La Torre, both current USHA National singles champions, decided to test the Open field once more. They won the first round, besting Fresno’s Fernando Diaz/Hugo Lopez, to earn the right to play the feared Collado brothers. Mike/Lennart actually built a substantial 14-4 lead before the Collados decided to shift into another gear, and caught and passed the champs to grab the first game and match.

In the finals, the Collado brothers, Loren and Anthony, had more than enough firepower and determination to beat the No. 1 seeds Erik Torres/Marc Tobin 21-14, 21-11. Parents Jennifer and Rene Collado cheered their sons from the gallery. Anthony is still young enough to play in the 23-and-under division at the World Handball Championships in Minneapolis this August—good luck!

**Men’s 50s:**

Sacramento’s Augie Herrera just had too much firepower and partner Tom McGrath too much court savvy in their contest against a very competitive team of Gary Stedman/Jim Silla. Augie pounded serves to Gary and Tom sent passes down the right, making Gary play a very large (and wide) court. The 2017 NorCal Hall-of-Famer fought valiantly but it was youth over beauty as the confidence level of Augie/Tom was never shaken. The reliable Jim Silla pounded reverse serves and looked for kill shot opportunities that never came as Tom and Augie used pass and ceiling shots to keep the ball coming to Gary. Good match, well played, in front of friends and family.

**Men’s 50s Consolation:**

Rory Moore/Mike Vane battled Artie Ward/Mike Linnik in the semis for a good match early Sunday a.m., but Artie’s trap kills and Linnik’s bolo punch ceiling shots helped get them the victory. In the finals Rory made another appearance, and together with the court coverage of lanky Glenn Mendell made for a testy and tight little affair on the Dolphins’ court.

Then Linnik borrowed a serve from Loren Collado, the underhanded Dominator serve, a deceptive little beauty that seems to knuckle in the air. Artie used some “overhand fist kill shots” to help take down the win.

**Men’s 70s:**

Current USHA National Masters Champions Jay Capell and Alan Sherrill took on the field—and the field said “bollocks!” Jay and Alan can still hang with the 60s and be competitive in the 50s, so it is looking like a long reign for these two gentlemen. Time to play four against two ... six players can fit on a court, right? They’ve done that in Ohio. Frank’s Texas BBQ put out a darn tasty shepherd’s pie for Saturday lunch, and the traditional corned beef and cabbage Saturday night. They made an awesome lunch the next day as the players hustled to win semi and final matches. Thanks to Frank, Tony, and the gang!

Thanks to Handball Commissioner Rory Moore, Wayne Black, Mary Capell (who baked great cookies), and Susan Crothers for helping keep the tournament desk humming.
We also put out a chair for Mike Alvarez’s spirit, who enjoyed doing the draws for years, despite not having a clue as to the relative strengths of the teams. For years players would look at the draw, make a puzzled face, and Mike would give us his famous “shrug and smile” that seemed to make everything OK. He will always be missed.

See everyone at Cinco de Mayo!

---

**SERC’s 145th Annual St. Patrick’s Day Luncheon**

*By Jane Koegel*

We celebrated St. Patrick’s Day in traditional club fashion: The bar opened at 11 a.m., the guests dined on corned beef and cabbage fare, and we were all entertained by Irish dancers and music.

Preparations got underway early. Thursday was my baking day: 18 dozen cupcakes. Jefferson washed 200 plates, forks, and knives. Cy Lo and helpers rolled the Hurley barge out of the boathouse that evening.

Al Jaurique showed up early Friday to roll the other woodens out, sweep the boathouse, fold the stage down, set up tables and chairs. Darlene Comstedt put down table coverings, set the tables, and put up decorations. Janie Bryant stopped by to help. Robin Kincaid and Wayne Black organized the Cook Shack. Kim Howard and Allison Kalhammer arrived from their Costco run to unload a car full of alcohol and bar snacks. I frosted and decorated the 220 cupcakes. Jon Grunstad delivered 30 extra chairs from the Dolphin Club (and returned them the next day).

Saturday morning, Al Jaurique set up the sound system, located a missing microphone, and then with Karee Stubbs barricaded the street in front of the club and monitored parking all day long. (Let me just say, Al, you are amazing!) Joyce Gagnon made herself my personal helper and competently did my bidding from morning until the club was cleaned up. Joe Butler cut up celery, prepared garnishes to be used in bar drinks, and then helped out all day including kitchen cleanup afterwards. Rosemary McNally’s sister Clare and Susan Petro showed up to be put to work, including putting out two plates of cupcakes on each table. Mary McMahon guarded the front door to check folks in and to sell tickets, and passed the cash intake off to Club Treasurer Susan Blew for safekeeping. Allison Kalhammer, Robin Kincade, Tara Sweet, Jennifer Yao, and Elizabeth Glass kept...
the libations flowing at the bar. Our local restaurateurs and club members Paul Capurro and son Lou cooked and served up delicious corned beef and all the fixings, and cleaned up afterwards.

Our master of ceremonies, Handball Commissioner Rory Moore, introduced the Irish dancers and entertainment and masterfully cheered us by singing a few Irish tunes himself.

When the party was over, so many folks stayed to help with cleanup that the club was a flurry until the dishes were cleared, the decorations taken down, the tables and chairs put away, the stage rolled up, the boats brought back in, the garbage cleaned up, and (God bless him!) Dennis Dunne had washed every dish.

A great party, the guests said. Thank goodness for volunteers named and unnamed. It is you who make the club go round.

Compared to some of our wild neighbors around the Bay Area, we're all newbies to California. Sturgeon have swum in our local waters for more than 2 million years. These giant fish can grow even larger than San Francisco Bay's biggest mammal, the sea lion. But because sturgeon stay far underwater along the bay's dark floor, few people ever see one.

Two sturgeon species live in northern reaches of the San Francisco Bay, which include San Pablo and Suisun Bays. White sturgeon (Acipenser transmontanus) are gray with a white underside. They can grow up to 20 feet long and weigh 1,500 pounds. Green sturgeon (Acipenser medirostris) are aptly named olive-green fish with dark green stripes on each side. They can grow up to seven feet long and weigh 350 pounds.

The white sturgeon is a homebody and stays in this area its entire life, which can be as long as 100 years. Green sturgeon spend their first three years here and then swim the Pacific Ocean for up to 60 years, returning only to spawn. Both species spawn upstream from the bay in the Sacramento River. Unlike salmon, which spawn just once, sturgeon spawn many times during their long lives.

Instead of scales, sturgeon have rows of bony plated armor called scutes that protect them from predators. Several specialized organs allow them to locate their main food, small fish and shellfish, in murky water along the bay floor. These organs include taste buds outside of their mouths, long dangling feelers, and electrical sensors.

After surviving here for millions of years, sturgeon have been hit hard during the past century and a half. Populations have been harmed as dams block access to former spawning rivers, and as bay fill and shoreline development take away large areas of habitat.

Overfishing has also been a historic problem. In the late 1800s, the fishing industry almost killed off the bay’s white
sturgeon for caviar. Commercial fishing for white sturgeon in the bay has been banned ever since. Strictly limited recreational fishing of white sturgeon is still allowed, and occasionally a fishing team will land a 400-500 pound fish.

Green sturgeon are even more scarce; it’s illegal for anyone to catch them.

And pollution, of course, also impacts sturgeon. Fishing for and eating bay sturgeon isn’t actually a healthy choice, because toxic substances accumulate in their bodies. California health officials advise women of childbearing age and children to not eat any sturgeon at all because of the contamination.

Parts of the bay where sturgeon live are hotspots for one particularly harmful pollutant, selenium. In trace amounts, selenium is a necessary nutrient for both fish and people. But excess selenium can cause deformities, interfere with reproduction, and kill fish. The endangered green sturgeon is especially vulnerable to selenium poisoning. And sadly, an invasive clam from Asia that arrived in the bay in the 1980s accumulates more selenium in its tissue than native shellfish. This clam has become a primary sturgeon food source.

A significant amount of selenium pollution comes from the Bay Area’s five oil refineries, which have permits to discharge treated wastewater containing selenium into the bay. Baykeeper is advocating for tighter limits on the amount of selenium refineries can release, to make the water safer and healthier for all the bay’s wildlife, and especially for this elusive giant neighbor of ours who’s been here for millennia.

To learn more about Baykeeper’s work to stop pollution in the San Francisco Bay, visit us at baykeeper.org.

Sejal Choksi-Chugh is the executive director of San Francisco Baykeeper. To report pollution in the bay, call Baykeeper’s hotline at 1-800-KEEP-BAY (1-800-533-7229), email hotline@baykeeper.org, or click “Report Pollution” at baykeeper.org.
Congrats New Life Members

Annie Somerville
Leslie Steele
Yofe Johnson
Robert Jochnowitz
Michael Raifsnieder

Welcome New Members

Alexander Annear
Alexander Matsaylo
Allen Porter
Andrea Vuturo
Ben Tillotson
Bob Barden
Brent Summers
Carl Martin
Carya Stamp

Chris Forni
Daire Corcoran
Daniel O’Donnell
Darcey Metzler
David Lupo
Dina Burkltbayeva
Duane Heil
Erica Sutherland
Gabriel Speyer
Gary Mansfield
Gillian Clements
Gorman Tori
Grace Ho
Jacqueline Tonge
James Poots
Jessica Stern
Joeber Rouse
John Hakes
John Landefeld
Josie Merer
Kevin Whalen
Kyle Dunne
Laura Packard
Leilani Castro
Liam Doyle
Linda Streb
Mary Kate Heck
Michael Altman
Michael Brletich
Mickey A Jones
Mimi Rosenheim
Mirra Schwartz
Mitchell Kristoff
Pablo Bueno
Pamela Ostroff
Peter Day
Ray Essick
Richard Keenan
Robber Van Zant

Roger Pettey
Ronald Whitney
Rory O’Connor
Sally West
Sara Hentz
Sarah Slaughter
Stephanie Knabe
Stephen Soisson
Tatyana Polyakova
Tracey Davis
Victor Critchfield
Werner Schmidt
William Carpenter
William Walker

In Memoriam

Richard Jentsch (May 19, 2017)
Rosemary McNally (January 24, 2018)