



## The first sailing club in the Portlands area of Toronto celebrates 50 years of providing low-cost and low-impact access for sailors and paddlers

TORONTO – The Water Rat Sailing Club will be hosting its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration (1969-2019) on **Saturday, June 22, 2019 from 11am to 4pm** (rain date: Sunday, June 23, 2019) located at **4 Regatta Road, Toronto**. At **1pm**, the club will welcome Julie Dabrusin (MP for Toronto-Danforth), Paul Henderson (the club's co-founder and former Olympian) as well as a tree planting ceremony with Paula Fletcher (Ward 14 Toronto-Danforth City Councillor). The event will round out with an open recreational “fun” all-boat team challenge regatta (sailing and paddling) in the afternoon.

The Water Rat Sailing Club was the first sailing club established east of Cherry Beach in the Portlands area of Toronto. Paul Henderson, Gordon Norton and Bill Cox gathered a group of sailors from the Royal Canadian Yacht Club (RCYC) in 1969 and worked with the Toronto Port Authority to lease a piece of land that had served as the test site for the Leslie Spit. The hot water discharge from the nearby Hearn Generating Station allowed the keen sailors to continue racing year around. The name of the club “Water Rat” originated from Kenneth Grahame’s children’s book “The Wind in the Willows” and the founders borrowed a line from the book for the club motto: “There is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats”. Willow trees were planted in 1970 at a time when there was sparse vegetation in the area and have grown to create a picturesque site, used over the years as a backdrop in several Canadian TV programs and films such as *Down the Road Again*.

Shortly after the establishment of the Water Rat, seven additional clubs sprung up along Regatta Road, making it a hub for dinghy sailing, windsurfing and paddling in Toronto. The Water Rat Sailing Club is well-known for its casual atmosphere; instead of a “commodore”, the top executive is known as the “Chief Rat” and for over 40 years, the clubhouse was the wheelhouse from a broken-down freighter ship with no electricity or running water.

As of 2019, the Water Rat Sailing Club continues to be a vibrant, not-for-profit co-operative club with more than 200 members. The focus is to provide low-cost access to sailing and paddling with a minimal environmental footprint. The club is proud of its connection to the Laser sailboat, a four-metre single-handed dinghy sailboat designed by Canadian Bruce Kirby, built by Ian Bruce with the sail designed by Hans Fogh. The Laser has become the Water Rat’s largest fleet with more than 75 boats. Many Water Rat members compete regularly in weekly club races as well as Canadian, U.S. and international regattas and throughout the club’s history, several Olympic and National champions have honed their sailboat racing skills at the club. In addition to the Laser, there is also a large fleet of catamarans, mono-hull sailboats, wind surfboards, kayaks and canoes.

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### Past Articles about Water Rat Sailing Club:

- Joe Berkeley, “Rat Pack,” March 23, 2016, <https://www.sailingworld.com/rat-pack>
- Paul Henderson, “A personal account: The Water Rat and Outer Harbour Sailing,” March 28, 2019, <http://www.canadianyachting.ca/news-and-events/current/4993-a-personal-account-the-water-rat-and-outer-harbour-sailing>

### Past Articles about the Laser:

- “The history of the Laser, Bruce Kirby and Ian Bruce,” Laser Sailing, <https://www.lasersailing.com.au/the-history-of-the-laser-bruce-kirby-and-ian-bruce/>
- Rob Kothe, “Interview with Bruce Kirby – the designer of the Laser - Part One”, Sail World, November 11, 2009, <https://www.sail-world.com/Canada/Interview-with-Bruce-Kirby-%E2%80%93-the-designer-of-the-Laser--Part-One/-62759>