

SUSTAINABLE MARBLEHEAD: The tide is turning on plastics

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A few months ago, Robert Howie, commodore of the Corinthian Yacht Club, had the opportunity to meet with Corinthian international member Dee Caffari, one of the world's greatest athletes and the only female skipper competing in the 2017-18 Volvo Ocean Race around the world.

At a stopover in Newport, Rhode Island, Howie interviewed Caffari not only about her sailing achievements, but also as the United Nation's ambassador to the global sailing community promoting its Clean Seas: Turn the Tide on Plastics campaign, which aims to engage governments, the private sector, and the general public in the fight against marine plastic litter.

Having sailed around the world five times, Caffari has seen her share of plastic. According to the United Nations, some 13 million tons of it end up in the oceans every year, and the number is growing. Plastic breaks down into microplastic, which is then ingested by marine life. At least 267 species have been affected, and 100,000 marine animals are killed every year by plastic bags alone. One in three leatherback turtles have plastic in their stomachs, which they mistake for jellyfish. Unless something changes, it's estimated that there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans by 2050.

Howie was so struck by what he learned in talking with Caffari that when he returned to Marblehead, he committed the Corinthian Yacht Club to becoming a full partner in the United Nations' global effort by:

- Taking the pledge in support of the #CleanSeas campaign
- Replacing plastic bags with paper ones for retail merchandise

- Installing a refillable chilled water bottle station to replace plastic water bottles
- Replacing plastic swizzle sticks with bamboo ones
- Replacing plastic straws, cups, and flatware with plant-based compostable ones
- Establishing a Sustainability Subcommittee to look for additional ways to be environmentally responsible

The reaction from the club's approximately 600 members has been overwhelmingly positive, according to Howie.

"Members wrote to me that this was one of the best things that ever happened here, and one of the most important things I've done during my watch as commodore," he said, thinking of his four children and five grandchildren. He gave special credit to Corinthian general manager David Titus, who embraced the initiative, found environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic, and has been retraining staff to use them.

"It's become such a habit to use plastic that you just don't think about it," Howie commented. "It takes time to create new habits."

Now that the Corinthian has taken action to fulfill its pledge, Howie is reaching out to others to see if he can convince them to join the effort. He's already been in touch with the commodores of the other yacht clubs in Marblehead, as well as U.S. Sailing and Scuttlebutt, the country's leading sailing blog. He's also happy to share his club's experience with other organizations and retail establishments in town.

In an email to Corinthian members, he also had this advice for those who want to make a difference:

- Take the pledge at <http://cleanseas.org/action>
- Tell your family and friends about the problem
- Choose products with little or no plastic packaging
- Avoid buying drinks in single-use plastic or Styrofoam cups
- Use a refillable water bottle

- Say no to plastic straws
- Remember your reusable shopping bags

As this article was going to press, we learned about another Marblehead establishment working to eliminate plastics: The Neckrun Cafe at Devereux Beach. Manager Caroline Broderick says that she's always been supportive of sustainable practices but hadn't had the opportunity to implement them until she took over management of the cafe this year and learned about alternatives to plastics from Sustainable Marblehead member Christine Cudihy.

"It just makes sense since we're right on the beach," Broderick said. She started out by eliminating plastic straws entirely, but about 20 percent of her customers complained. To keep everybody happy, she's moved to compostable straws and also replaced plastic cups with paper ones. Next, she plans to find environmentally friendly cutlery. "We're planning to use as little plastic as we can," she said.

Sustainable Marblehead, a community organization working to protect the environment through local citizen action and education, applauds these two establishments for their efforts and is working to address the plastics issue on a town-wide basis. Our Conservation Action Group, led by Patricia Sullivan, is currently conducting a survey of all food establishments to see how many are still using plastic with a goal of reducing plastics use by 50 percent in one year. To learn more about this and other issues in which we are involved, visit <http://sustainablemarblehead.org> and follow us on Facebook at <http://facebook.com/sustainablemarblehead>.

If your organization or business is taking action to eliminate plastics, please let us know what you're doing by emailing us at sustainablemarblehead@gmail.com. We want to hear from you and share your success!

Upcoming events

9 a.m.-noon July 14: Visit our booth at the Marblehead Farmers Market behind the Veterans Middle School on Pleasant Street.

10 a.m.–2 p.m. Oct. 6: Attend our Community-Wide Sustainability Fair at the Marblehead Community Charter Public School, 17 Lime St., for a fun-filled day featuring electric vehicle demonstrations, hands-on exhibits, educational speakers, and live entertainment.