
Opinion

SUSTAINABLE MARBLEHEAD: Boston Yacht Club launches 'Green Initiative'

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The Boston Yacht Club is joining the list of Marblehead clubs that are demonstrating exciting leadership in sustainability. As we reported last July, the Corinthian Yacht Club committed to being a full partner in the United Nations' Clean Seas program. In doing so, they created awareness in the club and the community about the impact of plastic, and they replaced all single use plastics used in the club with biodegradable substitutes.

With the launch of its Green Initiative, the BYC is making a similar commitment impactful and sustainable change. Sustainable Marblehead members Kurt James and Lynn Bryant sat down with the BYC's Tom Mager, rear commodore, and Phil Schrodel, House Committee chair, to talk about how the club is reducing its carbon footprint, and how their efforts are inspiring their community. The following is an excerpt of their conversation:

Sustainable Marblehead: First off, thank you both for taking time to meet with us. As you may know, Sustainable Marblehead is focused on educating residents regarding the need to provide for more environmental resiliency in town and decrease our overall carbon footprint, so we are very interested in finding out what other groups in town are doing to address these needs and identify synergies and opportunities to work together.

SM: Tom, you are the rear commodore at the BYC. What are your responsibilities at the club?

Tom Mager: As the rear commodore, I am principally responsible for employee relations and assisting the Vice Commodore and Commodore as required. I'm also the flag officer responsible for the BYC Green Initiatives.

SM: And Phil, as the House Committee chair, what are your responsibilities?

Phil Schrodell: As House Committee chair I provide guidance and oversee policies for operation of the club. This includes looking after the physical plant and, recently, working closely with Brian Pelland, the club's general manager, to implement the club's Green Initiative.

SM: What was the inspiration for the Green Initiative?

PS: Our interest started when my wife read an article about the importance of composting by Sustainable Marblehead. We began using Black Earth composting at home, which led to my effort to get the BYC into composting and other green initiatives.

SM: Tell us about what the club has been doing as part of the Initiative.

PS: Three years ago we started work to better weatherproof the building including replacing our older windows with new energy efficient windows. In addition, as part of a recent kitchen upgrade, we installed a new exhaust system that dramatically cut down on energy loss.

SM: We also understand you have implemented a number of sustainable practices for the staff and members.

PS: Yes, we now use Black Earth Compost composting for our kitchen and dining waste and have special composting bins around the club, including at the gazebo area. This should significantly reduce the amount of our food waste garbage being sent to landfills. We also use biodegradable plates, cups, straws and serving utensils, so all disposable items used at the Gazebo will be biodegradable, and therefore can be disposed of in the composting bins. In addition, the containers used for food-to-go from the Club are also being switched out to ones that are biodegradable and we have clearly marked recyclable and trash bins near the parking lot for trash and recyclable items.

SM: What are the cost effects of these measures?

PS: Brian has researched a number of options and has done a great job in identifying alternatives that are largely at or below the cost of our former products.

SM: Have there been any challenges with this initiative?

PS: Well, one challenge is that it is sometimes difficult for our staff and members to identify which items are recyclable and which are compostable and so we are working to better educate everyone.

SM: We also understand that the BYC is interested in greening races.

TM: Yes. As a racer, I have become increasingly aware of the effects of plastics and other pollutants on the ocean and sea life. I'm excited to be participating in the upcoming Marblehead to Halifax Ocean Race, which is registered as a "Sailors for the Sea Clean Regatta."

SM: What is Sailors for the Sea?

TM: Sailors for the Sea is an international conservation organization that engages and educates the sailing and boating community toward restoring ocean health.

SM: What are some of the ideas you have for the race?

TM: One of our primary goals is to reduce the use of disposable water bottles. On my boat, instead of carrying 1-2 cases of water bottles, we will be using reusable water bottles and carrying larger water containers for refilling bottles. In addition, the BYC has sourced a water dispenser capable of handling tall reusable water bottles and has purchased a large number of reusable bottles for sailors to use. We are also educating sailors on ways to reduce waste and being aware of what goes overboard. At the other end of race, we are told that the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron is employing a small water robot, which will collect trash along the docks in the Halifax Harbor. Our overall goal is to make the MHOR a clean regatta.

SM: We know it is early but what has been the reaction to the Green Initiative from club members?

TM: Very positive. We have had a number of fireside chats with our members, and this topic has drawn lots of support.

SM: What are some of the longer-range goals of the club?

TM: Recently we conducted an energy audit, which will help us identify other opportunities to update some of our other energy sources, and we may consider solar energy down the road.

SM: Are there ways in which the BYC is interacting with other clubs?

TM: Yes, the BYC, Eastern and Corinthian have ongoing communications on various club matters, including green initiatives, and Brian is in regular contact with the other clubs to share ideas on sustainable measures.

SM: Are there ways in which Sustainable Marblehead can assist in your efforts?

TM: We would be happy to work with you in planning an education event with the other yacht clubs.

SM: We would love to talk further about any such opportunities. Thank you very much!