

LOGAN MARTIN & NEELY HENRY

Lakelife

MAY/JUNE 2021

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ON
LOGAN
MARTIN

A TRADITION
AS OLD AS
THE LAKE

**DESTINATION:
GREENSPORT**

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Story by Paul South
Photos by David Smith, Submitted Photos



ON LOGAN MARTIN:



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ally Morriss, it seems, was born to sail.

Her parents joined the Birmingham Sailing Club when Morriss came into the world.

“That was back in 1964. And then through their membership, we were members in the 80s,” Morriss recalls. “I got married, raised kids, then came back to the club about 10 years ago. But I’ve sailed all my life. Literally.”

In a sense, Morriss’ voyage into the world of sailing mirrors the story of the sport on Logan Martin. In fact, the Birmingham Sailing Club came into the world in 1962, three years before the first trickle of water flowed into the Alabama Power built lake. Before that, sailing was as rare in the Magic City area as Champagne at a meat-and-three joint.

Sam Caldwell and Herb Hager changed the course of sailing in the Birmingham area. It was Caldwell, Hager and as the club’s website describes them, “15 foolhardy souls willing to pay initiation fees to a sailing club with no water,” who launched the effort. Forty-four charter members – most of whom didn’t know a spinnaker from a mainsail – began the club. Today, some 150 members from sailing novices to collegiate sailors to an America’s Cup competitor call the club their home port.

There’s a freedom, sailors say, in moving a vessel through the water powered only by wind.



Sailing Club in the early days

“The life lesson of sailing is that you’ve got to make your own decisions.”



Sailing sometimes gets a bad rap as an elitist sport, seen as reserved for the blue bleeding upper crust of Newport, Hyannis or Palm Beach. In fact, most sailboats cost less than the tricked-out bass or ski boats that troll Alabama lakes. And as for the Birmingham Sailing Club, the door is wide open to anyone who wants to solve the mystery of managing the intricacies of navigating a man-made lake and God-made current and wind.

“These people really don’t care so much about your career or the car you drive or what your address is. It’s about racing. How do you manage the wind and are you a good person?” says Birmingham Sailing Club Commodore Wayne Bucher. And they are very respectful of us new people learning. Their interest is largely in helping people learn so that they’ve got more competitors. The club has access for cruising style of sailing, but that’s not the primary focus.”

Fred Smith, whose family has been part of the club for three generations, agrees.

The whole legacy of the club is you can come out and not know a thing and you can take it as far as you want to. And it can be for your whole family or for an individual. For a niche sport, it’s a far-reaching program.

“Even though we are a private club, we’re really welcoming to guests,” Smith says “We want people to come out and see if sailing is something they’re interested in.”

As a father of three, all of whom grew up at the club, Smith’s passion is to build the club’s youth program. Two of his children have competed internationally. Isabel is finishing her freshman season on the Jacksonville (Fla.) University sailing team and has competed in the treacherous waters of Europe’s North Sea, while son Darby, 15, has competed at a high level as well.

The club conducts a weeklong youth sailing camp in the summer, two weekend camps and recently launched a Wednesday night “Fun Series.” Wednesday nights aren’t about competition, but participation.

“From a junior aspect, I think it’s really an untapped market that I would love to see evolve. If somebody tries it and has a passion for it, we want to be there for them.”

Sailing does more than teach kids a lifelong sport. It equips



Cars date this photo at the Sailing Club

them with a real-world skill for the adult working world. “The life lesson (of sailing) is that you’ve got to make your own decisions. Sailing being a lifelong thing, at an early age, it sets these kids up that as adults, you’re going to make your own decisions in life. You’re out there by yourself, and if you think it’s too much, you need to go in, or you need to go to your coach and say, “This is too much for me,” Smith says.

“Or, you’re going to battle through, or you’re going to get some advice and you’re going to go back out there. That’s what most of them do. There may be some tears, but the lesson out of that is they push themselves out of their circle of comfort. It might be challenging. It may not be fun for that few minutes. But the life lesson is that you’re in charge.”

BSC members like Morriss and Homewood resident Andy Horton have taken charge in national and international waters.

Morriss, a self-described “seat of the pants sailor” isn’t just a winner of the club’s Caldwell Cup, named for its founder. She’s also performed well nationally in the Flying Scot sailboat class, notably finishing fifth in the 2019 Women’s North American Championship in Sharon, Mass. Women have made their mark throughout BSC’s history.

“There are a lot of excellent female sailors out there,” Morriss says. “In regattas like the FSSA’s Women’s (North American Championships) or the Thistle Women’s Nationals, you meet female sailors and skippers from all over the country. These regattas have female skippers and crew. Many of them grew up sailing and are extremely competitive against women as well as men in joint competitions.”

The land surrounding the lake, as well as shallow water, combined with fickle winds that either gust to 30 mph, or blow at barely a whisper, make Logan Martin unique.

“The mountainous terrain around Logan Martin can affect the wind and the wind shifts,” Morriss says. “And so, it is a lot different than sailing on a bay where the wind is constant. ... On Logan Martin, you could have wind coming from the south and the north at the same time. It can be crazy. It’s very challenging because the wind is up and down.

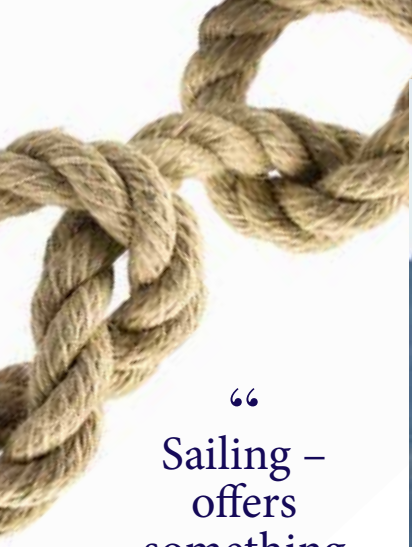
“The only time it’s not fun is when there’s no wind,” Morriss adds.

Horton, a three-time All-America sailor in his undergraduate days at Hobart College, is a New England transplant who discovered Birmingham Sailing Club shortly after relocating to Birmingham four years ago. He also crewed on an America’s Cup boat and was a gold medalist at the 1991 Pan American Games. More recently, Horton was interviewed by phone while serving as tactician for a competing craft in the St. Thomas International Regatta. Like the rest of the COVID-19 planet, the sailing world is slowly reopening. In normal



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times, Horton would be sailing out of the country for 15 weeks a year.

A Google search led to discovering the club and the lake.

“I didn’t know if there were alligators or not,” Horton says. “I’m not kidding.”

After finding the club locked when he got there, he decided to take a gander at the lake itself. “After three minutes, I said, ‘OK, I can sail my Moth (a type of dinghy) on there without hitting one of the sides.’”

While he has competed in sailing’s stratosphere, Horton believes clubs like BSC are vital to growing the sport. He calls Birmingham Sailing Club “special,” a place open to all.

“Anytime we can get anyone on the water, we’ve won. That’s just my theory about sailing. For me, and I see in my own little girls (ages five and eight), the freedom for little kids – or even an adult – to get out in a boat and control their own destiny ... it’s for everybody. I think it’s so important for younger people especially.”

Sailing – for newcomers and seasoned mariners alike – offers something missing in a society that seemingly measures time in nanoseconds.

“It’s quiet. It’s peaceful. It doesn’t matter where you are. Of course

it’s beautiful here (on the Caribbean). But in the summer, I go sailing every single day I can on (Logan Martin), just to get out there in the air and the wind. It’s the most relaxing thing in the world.”

As for the future, Bucher hopes the club and the sport will continue to grow and be a place where all are welcome – a place for competition, learning, fun and fellowship for the young and young at heart.

The winds of Logan Martin may be as unpredictable as a loose toddler as the club nears its 60th anniversary in 2022, but the spirit and vision of the founders still sails steadily forward in fair winds and following waters. Morriss, like other present-day members, thanks Caldwell and other founding members for their foresight, opening their club to all who wanted to sail.

“That legacy just continues to this day,” she says.

Bucher agrees. “Sailing draws people for various reasons, and most of them can be accomplished at BSC. A romantic notion of chasing the wind, or relaxing in a pleasant breeze, or a forum to be humbled by both competition and Mother Nature. Birmingham Sailing Club is more than a place. It is a group of people who teach sailing.” 