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Cardinal Sailing Club prepares to test Lake Michigan

April 11, 2008

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BY SUE ELLEN ROSS Post-Tribune correspondent

EAST CHICAGO -- Members of the Cardinal Sailing Club at East Chicago Central High School are celebrating spring in a special way.

The teens are busy after school, learning the fundamentals of boats, sailing and water safety. After they complete these lessons, they will be ready to hit Lake Michigan this summer with their classmates.

"As participants, students have to pass boating-safety courses before the water phase," said Jim Severa of Hammond, a volunteer with the group.

Severa, an avid sailor, learned about it while serving with the U.S. Navy in Japan. He discusses his experiences with the students, which allows them to see how to handle challenges firsthand.

"The most difficult thing about learning to sail is maneuvering in and out of the dock in a confined space," Severa said.

The program was developed by Purdue University Calumet professor Geoffrey Barrow, who established the Indiana Sailing Association. Barrow also runs a sailing program at PUC for college students.

The Indiana Sailing Association is a not-for-profit group that provides training for and access to open-water sailing for East Chicago high school students. Since the ISA was established in 1989, more than 2,000 teens have participated in its activities.



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On a personal level, Barrow said students are learning much more than just the basics of sailing a boat.

"They are learning self-confidence, teamwork, discipline and environmental awareness (wind and water)," he said.

The sailing classes, which include after-school sessions at Central High School, include bookwork that starts each February. Materials from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources are used.

"Lake Michigan is a superb body of water," Barrow said. "Making a boat sail with your own hands, capturing the wind in sails, working together outside -- away from land -- in summer is a great eye-opener for urban youth.

"New horizons for learning open up -- technology, fluid dynamics, physics and mechanics. And, it's fun."

The program, which ends in August, is funded through several sources.

"The project is supported by the School City of East Chicago, the East Chicago Marina and Port Authority, Mayor (George) Pabey and Foundations of East Chicago (equipment and maintenance)," Barrow said.

Outside donors and corporations also help with funding, he said.

There is no cost to the East Chicago students.

In spring, weather permitting, those who have completed the required classroom time head to Lake Michigan to practice their new skills.

Besides Severa and Barrow, three other men have returned each year to volunteer with the program.

Hammond residents Mark Sudicky, Tom Case and Chris Kosovich work with the participants as they go through the course.

"We are working on getting some of the students to talk about their experiences by posting messages on our sailing association Web site," Kosovich said. "We want them to share their knowledge of what they've learned with one another and future East Chicago High School participants."

AT A GLANCE

The Indiana Sailing Association Web site is www.indianasailing.org.

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