

Winter 2021

Washington Canoe Club

CURRENTS



Photo by Bill Woodruff

Happy new year and welcome to our Winter 2021 issue of *Currents*!

In this issue, we feature:

- **Membership renewal for 2022 opens January 1**
- 2021 Annual Meeting summary
- Cold water paddling safety tips
- Call for entertainment committee volunteers
- A spotlight on WCC's Juniors program by **Mary Stapp**
- A brief history of WCC's winter war canoe tradition by **Liz Pennisi**
- A building and grounds update by **Jim Ross**
- A recap of the 2021 OC6 racing season by **Nate Day**



Here we are, the final day of 2021. If you have not done so already, please consider making a tax-deductible end-of-the-year gift to the Washington Canoe Club. It is your generous support that allows us to pay for Club maintenance and improvements. Each contribution is a commitment to your Club's future. You can [donate online](#) or send a check to The Washington Canoe Club, PO Box 25449, Washington, DC 20007-8449.

Thank You and Happy New Year!

Just a quick technical note, dear readers... Gmail "clips" email messages that it deems too "content-heavy" – which this newsletter certainly is! So make sure that when you come to what you might think is the end of the newsletter, you click on "view entire message." You will know you've come to the end when you get to the shout-out!

Upcoming Events

WCC 2022 Membership Renewal Opens January 1 and Ends January 31.

All returning members must [re-register](#), sign the waiver, and pay 2022 dues in SportsEngine, *including non-resident and honorary lifetime members.*

After four years at the same rate, the WCC Board is implementing a modest dues increase of one hundred dollars for 2022 to put us in a better position to secure financing for boathouse restoration. Additional boat storage fees remain unchanged.

If you selected the quarterly payment option in 2021 you must set it up again for 2022 during the registration process — it does not carry over.

We currently have a wait list for membership so please email membership chair, [Kelsa Gabehart](#), to let her know if you are changing your membership status. **If you have not registered and paid by January 31, 2022 your membership spot will be given to a new member from the wait list.**

Any boat/board storage changes should be directed to commodore [Tim Johnson](#). Fees for additional boat storage (those with more than one boat/board) will be invoiced separately after registration is complete. The invoice will come in February from SportsEngine, independent of the registration process.

We look forward to paddling with you in 2022!

News and Information

2021 Annual Meeting



The **117th Annual Meeting** of the Washington Canoe Club was held via Zoom on November 18, 2021. There were informative presentations made by each of the club's committee chairs, including the boathouse restoration and fundraising committees, and the election of the Board of Governors who will serve the club in 2022.

If you missed the meeting, do not despair. You can [download the presentation](#) and [watch the Zoom recording](#) which is posted on the members-only section of the website.

Cold Water Paddling Safety

WCC members are fortunate that we get to paddle year-round even when other clubs and venues have closed for the season. As of mid-November, the river temperatures have fallen below 50 f. Please be mindful that even if the air temps are "warm", immersion in the river is dangerous.

Although the Club does not have an official list of cold water paddling rules, here are some basic guidelines to help safeguard paddlers in cold weather.

- Members are always encouraged to wear a life jacket/PFD, especially if the air or water temperature is below 40' F. Members and guests paddling club boats are required to wear a PFD.
- Paddle with a buddy. If you're heading out alone, please let someone know you're out, where you're heading, and when you expect to return.
- All paddle craft must have a light on board if you're out before sunrise or after sunset.
- Take a cellphone or other form of communication with you, especially if you're on your own.
- If the water is cold and the weather looks bad (high winds or storms), stay safe by remaining on land.
- Paddle near shore. Know yourself and your skills. Don't go out just because "other

- people are out there."
- Always dress for the water temperature—no exceptions.
- Field-test your gear.
- Imagine the worst that can happen and plan for it.

For further guidance on cold weather paddling, members are encouraged to consult these resources:

- [National Center for Cold Water Safety](#)
- [Safe Cold Water Paddling from Paddling.com](#)
- [Potomac River Safety Committee](#)
- [Paddling Tips for Cold Water](#)

Also check out [this video](#) from the U.S. Coast Guard's Cold Water Boot Camp USA featuring **Professor Popsicle**.



WCC NEEDS YOU to be on the Entertainment Committee.

Lisa Ramm, the rock-solid spirit and organizer of WCC social events for the past 6 years, has stepped down as Entertainment Committee Chair. Lisa's events were always successful because her planning was meticulous **and** she always made our events delicious, fun, and welcoming. We are incredibly grateful for everything Lisa has done for our community!

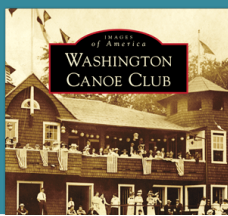
Now we need your help in serving as Entertainment Committee Chair or Co-Chair!

The Entertainment Committee is responsible for planning and hosting club-wide events throughout the year (at least in non-COVID years), including Crab Feasts, Oyster Roasts, the Annual Banquet, and club meetings – events that we all enjoy and that bring us together and build a sense of community among members. The Chair also manages requests from members and outside groups wishing to hold parties and events at the club.

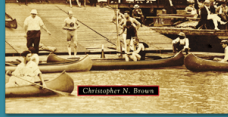
If you are organized and can network, delegate, and inspire your fellow members to work together to host the events that benefit our community, please contact entertainment@washingtongcanoecub.org.



The WCC History Book is Still Available



Images of America: Washington Canoe Club, by WCC lifetime honorary member **Chris Brown**, is still available for [purchase](#) (and all proceeds from the sale will go to the boathouse restoration fund). Or [donate](#) \$250 or more to the restoration fund and receive a complimentary signed copy.



Chris Brown's pictorial history of WCC is the culmination of a three-year project sorting through thousands of images that document the WCC's 115-year history. The book has accounts of floods and dramatic rescues, pioneering women and men in paddling, social events and high jinx, Olympic greatness, and everyday living, all in the context of the remarkable 20th century of Washington history. It chronicles a century of activity along the Potomac River and a social institution of highly competitive, high-spirited men and women.

Head over to our [history page](#) and watch **Chris Brown's Virtual Book Talk** that was given via Zoom on December 3, 2020.

Fierce WCC Juniors Bond Over Competition, Friendship, and Fun

By Mary Stapp

There is something joyful about watching the Junior team line up across the river to begin practice or to race each other or just to play, which is what they are always doing – even when they are working hard. They are constantly laughing, poking fun, and telling silly stories. They are the heart and soul, and obviously the future, of the Club.



"I think we honestly have the most fun out of all the clubs," says **Helen Schuette**, comparing the WCC juniors to others she saw at Nationals last summer in Oklahoma. The high school senior went on to describe the "close-knit" club, each of whom helps each other out as a matter of course, all of whom lost their voices yelling for the others as they competed.

Helen Schuette

For the last 10 years **Kathleen McNamee**, head coach of the program, and a WCC Junior herself back in the '90s, has worked hard to foster the fun and positive culture around paddle sport.

"I talk to the juniors often about how my main goal as a coach is for them to enjoy paddling," McNamee writes in an email at the end of the 2021 season, at which time she stepped down. She leaves having achieved the goal most important to her as a coach: self-improvement for each of the 14 or so teens on the team.



Outgoing coach Kathleen McNamee

"At the 2021 National Championships, all the junior athletes came away with personal bests and most came away with medals," she writes. "My best memories from coaching are always the ones where the athletes have performed better than they thought they

could.”

Ana Rhodes says it’s sad that Kathleen is leaving, and her sister Erin adds, “She is kind of family for most of us.”

Assistant Coaches **Gavin Ross** and **David Podluch** continue to contribute to this atmosphere of fun and growth and plan to work with the program into 2022.

It’s a Saturday morning at the end of Junior’s practice and **Ava Zahler** is the last junior still in plank alongside Gavin and **Ian Ross**. When she finally goes down, Gavin and Ian swipe at each other’s elbows, each in pursuit of sole (plank) survivor. Gavin finally gets a good jab at Ian and is the day’s winner. **Riley Johnson** shows me all the different boats they use and the scoop-shape kayak paddles that Riley says “create your own personal rain storm when you’re paddling.”



Assistant Coaches Gavin Ross and David Podluch plan to work with the program into 2022.

Gavin says some of the paddlers on the junior team joined as part of a summer program, and just got hooked, but for Riley, it took a pandemic to get her involved. She got sick of lazing around with her brother and was thrilled to be able to join the team. “Finally,” she says, “I had SOMETHING to do!”

Little did she know how much there would be to do, since the Juniors get put to work by **Jim Ross** on a regular basis. “Child labor,” Ana Rhodes calls it, laughing as usual. Untrue, Jim shoots back: “They get paid in popsicle sticks.”

A debate ensues about the chain of command over the Juniors.

“It’s God, then Jimmy, then Kathleen,” says **Alistair Leath**, the nephew of said Honcho. Then Alistair’s brother Graham says that ‘Danno’ (**Dan Havens**) is in there too.

“Yeah,” says Alistair, “Jimmy is like the CEO who is always out of town, but when he shows up—”

“You HAVE to pay attention,” Ana finishes.

They are chewing on Dan’s spot in the chain of command when Ana’s brother, **Sam Rhodes**, pipes up: “Danno is not really one of our coaches, but he IS the guy who’s like, he’ll be paddling by and be like, ‘Hey if you straighten your arm you’ll go faster.’”



The teens, who range from seventh to 12th grades, have even more fun ticking off all the jobs they have tackled around the boathouse. There is the usual mucking out of mud after a flood, but there is also moving racks of boats with the boats still on them, removing the motorboat (aka launcher) from the water, baling the motorboat, sawing up old unrepairable kayaks, helping to build docks, SUP racks, rec boat racks, slings, hauling rotten wood to the dumpster, taking the docks to and



from their winter home, emptying the trash cans, putting people in trash cans, getting put into trash cans.

The Juniors help with grounds cleanup.

Erin Rhodes recalls using a “power” washer that only washes a centimeter at a time. “So you make a grid and it takes like an hour to do one square meter,” she says.

“And then two days go by and all the sludge grows back,” Alistair adds.

They get to thinking about it and laugh some more about how the men’s team shows up and always seems to be in a hurry to get out on the water!

“Most of the time we have a good bit of fun doing everything that is asked,” Ana admits. “We make fun of each other, we slap each other, it’s a great time.”



The Juniors team at camp, Lake Placid, NY.

Kidding aside, the Juniors gain lifelong skills with the learning that goes on, both in the boats and around the club. Their dedication is especially impressive when you take into account that they work out three to five (sometimes six) times each week and get no credit for it at their schools.

Long-time member **Theresa (DiMarco) Haught** says what they are getting is way more important. She began as a Bantam (the youngest you can be in competition) in 1972 when she says there were living “legends” around the club on the regular. She got hooked on paddling as she moved through the Junior team at WCC, then rising through the national ranks to actually make the fateful Team USA in 1980, the year the U.S. boycotted the

Olympics, dashing so many dreams.

Still, paddling became a lifelong sport for Theresa, who says that dedication to athletics, and paddle sport in particular, has benefitted her in everything she does.

“Very, very, very hard training and commitment like that? That carries over to your life, you know, in every aspect,” says Theresa, who went on to become a critical care nurse. “When a Code would happen in the hospital, it was like a ‘Ready, Go’ moment. My adrenaline would kick in, and I could focus fast.”

It’s been almost 50 years and Theresa is still paddling at WCC twice a week, competing on the outrigger canoe team. She sees the Juniors team as vital to the Club: “I feel the most important aspect of that Canoe Club is developing Junior paddlers.”

She also feels their joy, saying, “I’m always really happy when I’m around them.”



The Juniors (in Halloween costumes) do some posing after the Havens 10k race in October.

For more information about the WCC Juniors program email aquatics@washingtongcanoecub.org.

Winter’s Boats: War Canoes

By Liz Pennisi

Photos courtesy of Bonnie Havens and Bill Woodruff

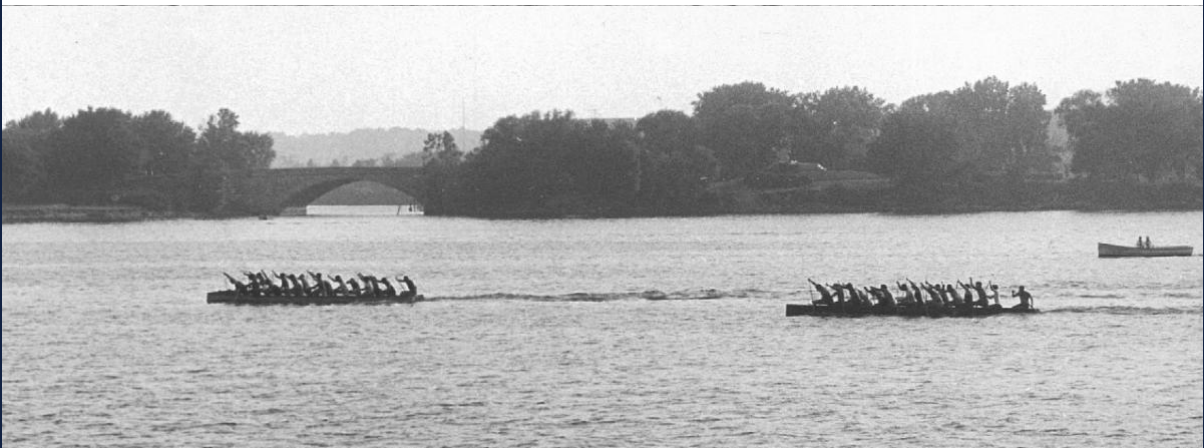
Many WCCers have hung up their paddles until spring, but a few hardy souls have just begun the season. Beginning Thanksgiving Day, **Dan Havens** and **Jim Ross** dusted off the war canoes and began their weekly Sunday morning workouts regardless of the weather (well, almost). In doing so they continue a tradition that dates to the club’s earliest days and helps ensure that young athletes (and some older ones) keep their paddling muscles and balance tuned up even when they can’t get into their sprint boats. That’s quite important given that national team trials can be in April, barely a month after regular practices resume.





Freshly restored war canoes on a typical Sunday morning in the early 2000s.

“It’s a workout,” says **Jim Ross**. Not just because they do 10-to 20-minute pieces but also because there can be days when icicles form on beards, and droplets freeze on the gunnel with each stroke. More than once, the canoes have had to break through the ice. But in former days, there often would be peppermint schnapps in the bottom of the boat for whenever anyone needed a boost and then a warm fire in the potbelly stove in the clubhouse to take the chill off when the practice was done. The historic painted frieze that wraps around that room (known as the grill room) even includes a 15-person boat.



WCC's war canoe wins the 1958 Presidents Cup Regatta.

Those 15-person boats were WCC’s earliest war canoes. They were sold at some point to buy two 4-person sprint kayaks. Then in 1963, two modern 8-person war canoes arrived by tractor-trailer almost to the WCC gate. When the truck couldn’t fit under the aqueduct, WCCers shouldered the crated canvas-covered wooden craft to take them into their new home. **Bill and Frank Havens** took charge, keeping the boats in good repair and training high-kneeling war canoeists for national and regional races. As is today, the goal was to help racers, but Bill and Frank welcomed all-comers. Practices were Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, and several top paddlers got their start there.

Races could be epic. New York City’s five canoe clubs (all of them now just recreational) hosted an annual “Bridge to Bridge” 16-mile race on the Hudson River, from the Tappan Zee to the George Washington Bridge. There would be all girls and all boys teams, all pulling downriver at about 9 miles per hour. In DC, one race went from Mount Vernon to the Washington Canoe Club.

Long paddles were routine, but the canoes were also for fun. One Fourth of July, Frank and Bill built a platform between two canoes large enough to fit a band, a buffet with turkey and ham, and ladies and gents all dressed up. The festivities were quite lively, until a police boat going way too fast swamped the canoes with its wake, sending a non-swimmer flying into the water. Ten more people jumped in to rescue her. Meanwhile, deviled eggs were floating by, and the turkey drifted downstream. Another time, a similar “barge” was used to retrieve a giant anchor found submerged just below Chain Bridge.



A crew takes out a freshly restored war canoe in the early 2000s. A few of these robust souls are still paddling war canoe every Sunday morning.

Once Frank and Bill retired, war canoeing seemed to be on the wane, except that Jim and Dan really wanted to keep their sons Ian and Sean and later, Gavin paddling through winter. Now all are grown up, but the fathers have kept up the tradition, and young paddlers such as **Ava Zahler** and **Graham and Alistair Leith**, the **Schuetz** clan, and **Anna and Sam Rhodes** bundle up Sunday mornings and high-kneel shoulder to shoulder with adult paddlers, some of them sitting on the thwarts to paddle because they have yet to master the high-kneel. “It’s a stable platform and [the kids] don’t have to worry about tipping, steering or stroke rate,” Jim explains. “They can focus on the stuff they want to work on.”





Juniors carry on the war canoe tradition.

It's also a chance for paddlers of different ages and skill levels to mix. "We take all-comers" to the 9 a.m. Sunday practices, "but they have to be willing to work," Jim adds. When **Ursula Rhodes**, now one of the club's senior members, became a regular, Jim remembers being worried. There was a headwind that day, and he knew how painfully cold the first 10 minutes could be. He kept hearing Ursula muttering and worried she was having trouble. So he stopped to see if she needed him to turn around. No, she said, "If you must know, I'm repeating to myself, 'this is better than erging.'"



Restoration of the war canoes in the early 2000s.

In time, those two boats expanded to four but not by spending \$60,000 on new ones and both have stories to tell. One was donated by the Marines who once had a program on the lower Potomac. **Dan Havens** and his friends and family pieced the other one together: half was sprouting weeds in his/Frank's backyard, and the rest was salvaged by a Mid-Atlantic Canoe Association paddler from a boat crushed by a falling tree. Fiberglass has replaced canvas, but the 25-foot long boats still weigh 150 pounds, empty.

Jim thinks that if the young elite paddlers stopped these winter workouts, he'd stop doing them. But Dan thinks war canoeing will never die: "Everything else at the canoe club changes, but the war canoes stay the same."

Building and Grounds

A Dry Quiet December

By Jim Ross

The canal was drained Dec 1st and 2nd and literally by the 3rd, not only had the water intrusion into the club stopped but the club was dry. It is clear to us that the water in the club comes from a canal leak. I suspect we'll be dry until spring when the canal is re-watered. We'll continue to communicate with the NPS regarding this issue.

I am monitoring the overnight temperatures in the DMV but as of yet, we have not had a hard freeze so the club water has not been turned off yet. We'll send out an email notice and post on the club's Facebook page to let everyone know if and when that happens.

Most folks seem comfortable with incurring the risk of leaving the docks in front of the club this winter so that will be the plan. Sometime soon we will haul and winterize the launch.

Team Announcements

WCC Coaches: Kelly Rhodes (Women's Outrigger), Nate Day (Men's Outrigger), Joe Cafferata (Novice Outrigger), Gavin Ross & David Padluch (Junior's), TBD (Master's Kayak), and Kathy Summers (SUP)

Fall Racing Highlights

By Nate Day

Three races highlighted the men's OC6 fall schedule: Monumental here in DC, Catalina in Southern California, and the Chattajack 31 in Chattanooga, TN.



WCC's mixed Monumental race crew.

At Monumental, the team's showing was a little disappointing: 2nd, 3rd, and 5th in the men's race, with crosstown friends and race hosts NCA finishing first, and a team from the Philadelphia Dragon Boat Association finishing fourth. Blame, if such can be assigned, is to be placed squarely at the feet of yours truly, the coach, who rather than stacking one crew with the team's top paddlers elected to spread them across several crews in order to give the folks going to California two weeks later the chance to race together.

The men's and women's teams together swept the podium in the mixed race, and the strong performance of a mixed senior masters crew (all team members over 50) is worth noting as well.



WCC's men's open crew at Catalina.

Catalina, the weekend after Labor Day, proved to be one of the greatest technical paddling challenges anyone on either the men's open and masters crews had faced. The lineups were first reduced by work and Covid concerns, and then bolstered by friends from California (Monterey area) and the Big Island of Hawai'i (Kawaihae).

The team dinner — prepared by grillmaster **Kyle Kosinski** — the night before the race was a wonderful time, with many opportunities to talk story and strategy with teammates new and old from near and far, including **Shane Rye** (currently of Kailua, Oahu), **Barry Slaff** and **Stuart Smith**, in their first change race with WCC, and **Roland Shackelford** and **Rob Olson**, brother and brother-in-law of women's team member **Rachel Shackelford**.

The race itself is thirty miles across the channel between Catalina Island and Newport. In a typical year, the race features 2-3 foot waves coming from the stern quarter on the 'ama (outrigger) side; this year, the waves were 3-5 feet, frequently breaking, and coming almost directly onto the 'ama — the most difficult direction to handle, as each oncoming wave lifts the outrigger above the center of mass of the canoe, making huli (capsizing) a constant risk. Both crews made it across without flipping, however, and finished respectably in the middle of the pack, thanks to the able steering of **Shane Rye** and **Rob Shackelford**, who said the course was more challenging than any Moloka'i Hoe he'd ever steered.

So: not bad for such challenging conditions, with WCC-depleted crews, in our first year racing in the unlimited division. These results bode well for a WCC return in force to Catalina in 2022.





The WCC men's masters crew at Chattajack 31.

The OC6 racing season ended with the Chattajack 31 on October 23. This was both the first year WCC had entered an OC6 crew at Chattajack, and the first race for our new unlimited OC6, **Kolea**. Much else was noteworthy about going to this race: the loan of WCC president Andrew Soles' van-cum-living-room-on-wheels to tow **Kolea** over ten hours each way; the able trailer driving of **George Smawley**, the encounters with paddling greats **Greg Barton**, **Jim Terrell**, **Kai Bartlett**, and **Terry Kent** in Chattanooga and on the water.

And then there was the race itself: the early morning fog lifting made for a dramatic start, the weather was unseasonably and comfortably warm, and a TVA water release made for a race in which many records were set. Following the stroke pair of **Mike Grachev** and **Rob Bowman**, and the cheerful change-calling of **Will Rhodes**, the men's masters OC6 crew (**Grachev**, **Bowman**, **Rhodes**, **George Smawley**, **Tom Cooney**, **Nate Day**) finished second on the OC6 division and third overall behind Greg Barton's K2 team and an open age men's OC6 crew from Florida; **Blaise Rhodes** and **Dan Havens** edged out **Dale Andrade** and **Tim Summers** for third in the men's OC2 division; **Martin Lowenfish** finished 3rd in the men's OC1 division; **Ian Ross** beat most of the solo racing high kneeling a wood strip C1 built by **Jim Terrell**; **Kathy Summers** competed on a prone board for the first time; and **Kelly Rhodes** won the women's OC1 division with a course record time of 4:23:34.

Our experience this fall gives the WCC men's outrigger team much to look forward to in a hopefully-less-Covid-impaired 2022 campaign. **Thanks to all who trained, raced, and supported us this year.**

Head over to the WCC photo [gallery page](#) to see more exciting race photos.

Itching to use those gift cards?

Do your online shopping at smile.amazon.com
Select **Friends of the Washington Canoe Club** as your
charity and AmazonSmile donates to WCC.

And Finally...

Shout Out!

Huge thanks to our outgoing Vice-Commodore **Peter Swiek**. In addition to his WCC Vice-Commodore duties, Peter developed an online elite craft checkout process which will limit damage and increase accountability for those using the WCC OC1s, surfskis, and sprint kayaks. Peter continues to serve on the Potomac River Safety Committee representing the paddling community. Thank you, Peter!

Thanks to everyone who takes out the trash, winterizes our club, and tidies things up in the foyer on a regular basis.

If you know of a WCC member who should get a shout-out (and there are many), [let us know](#).



Show Your Club Spirit and Look Good Doing It!

Any item can be customized with your name.

The WCC Squad Locker stores have a wide variety of club-branded items for members of all ages (including infants and toddlers). All items allow for personalization through the ordering process. With embroidered items, you can put your name (or mantra) on the sleeve. If an item has a printed logo, you can get your name (or nickname) on the back or sleeve. Hats are personalized on the back band area. Both shops are periodically updated and changed, so keep checking back. If there's something you would like to see offered, [let us know](#).

Visit the [Spring/Summer Store](#)

Visit the [Fall/Winter Store](#)

Thanks to Bonnie Havens for all her hard work on the stores.

THANK YOU to all club volunteers

If you have an idea for a contribution to the next issue of *Currents*, please reach out to one of your newsletter team members:

[Gloria Vestal](#) | [Dawn Nunziato](#) | [Mary Stapp](#) | Liz Pennisi



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