



Sailor Risseeuw Coaching His Passion with Tigers



With an extensive background on the waters, Ivoryton resident Paul Risseeuw brings passion for sailing to Hand as he enters his third season as the Tigers' sailing club coach.

Photo courtesy of Paul Risseeuw

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Ivoryton resident and lifelong sailor Paul Risseeuw truly has the best of both worlds, teaching the sport he loves to people he enjoys at Hand.

Paul and sailing have been inseparable, beginning their romance in 1957 in his hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin before he became a commodore and head instructor of Pettipaug Yacht Club in Essex. The U.S. Sailing Regional training coordinator is now docked in Madison as he enters his third season as coach of the Tigers' sailing club, which has grown from six members to 28 during his stint. Aside from coaching his craft, Paul's main goal is making the experience enjoyable for the young skippers and crew.

"I want to see them getting better each time and make sure every kid sails each day," says Paul, who co-coaches the squad with Maria Keogh. "If we do not win on certain days, I am not bothered; I just want to see them improve and have fun. There is no yelling with me as I take notes and tell the kids what to improve upon afterwards. But I have so much fun working with these kids."

The 69-year-old former Electric Boat employee's course shifted direction to Hand following a call from club co-founder and scheduler Misty Pilz, who asked him to take on new waters with perfect parameters.

"Misty called me after the previous coach left and it wasn't like, 'Can you do this?' but rather, 'We need you to do this,'" recalls Paul, who earned a degree in naval architecture and Marine engineering at Webb Institute in Glen Cove, New York and a graduate degree in the latter at the University of Michigan. "When I got here, I asked [Hand Athletic Director] Craig Semple what he was looking for and he said he wanted the kids to have a good experience, which I could certainly work with."

Working with him since 2011, Keogh expresses she could not have had anyone better to coach the Tigers with than Paul, a mercenary for youth sailing who does all he can to share his nautical love.

"There probably would not have been a sailing team here without him stepping up and making the arrangements with Pettipaug," says Keogh on Paul, whose club has home races and practices at Pettipaug. "He is incredibly devoted to his craft and this job; he is always putting in the extra hours to make things run smoothly. He truly loves working with the kids. I couldn't have asked for a more knowledgeable, nicer, and helpful person than him."

In addition to teaching what he loves, the junior sailing chairman for the Eastern Connecticut Sailing Association is surrounded by a group of wonderful kids in his eyes. While he expresses the winds may not be strong enough to carry the team to varsity right now, he feels the Tigers have shown they are on the right path for greater success.

"It's been great being with these kids. They are all very intellectual and have no trouble or academic issues," says Paul, who thanks his wife Mary, whom he met through sailing. "They keep getting better out there as last year's club excelled more than previous years. We now have about four or five of the kids as sailing instructors so this club is more of a learn-to-race group than a learn-to-sail one."

