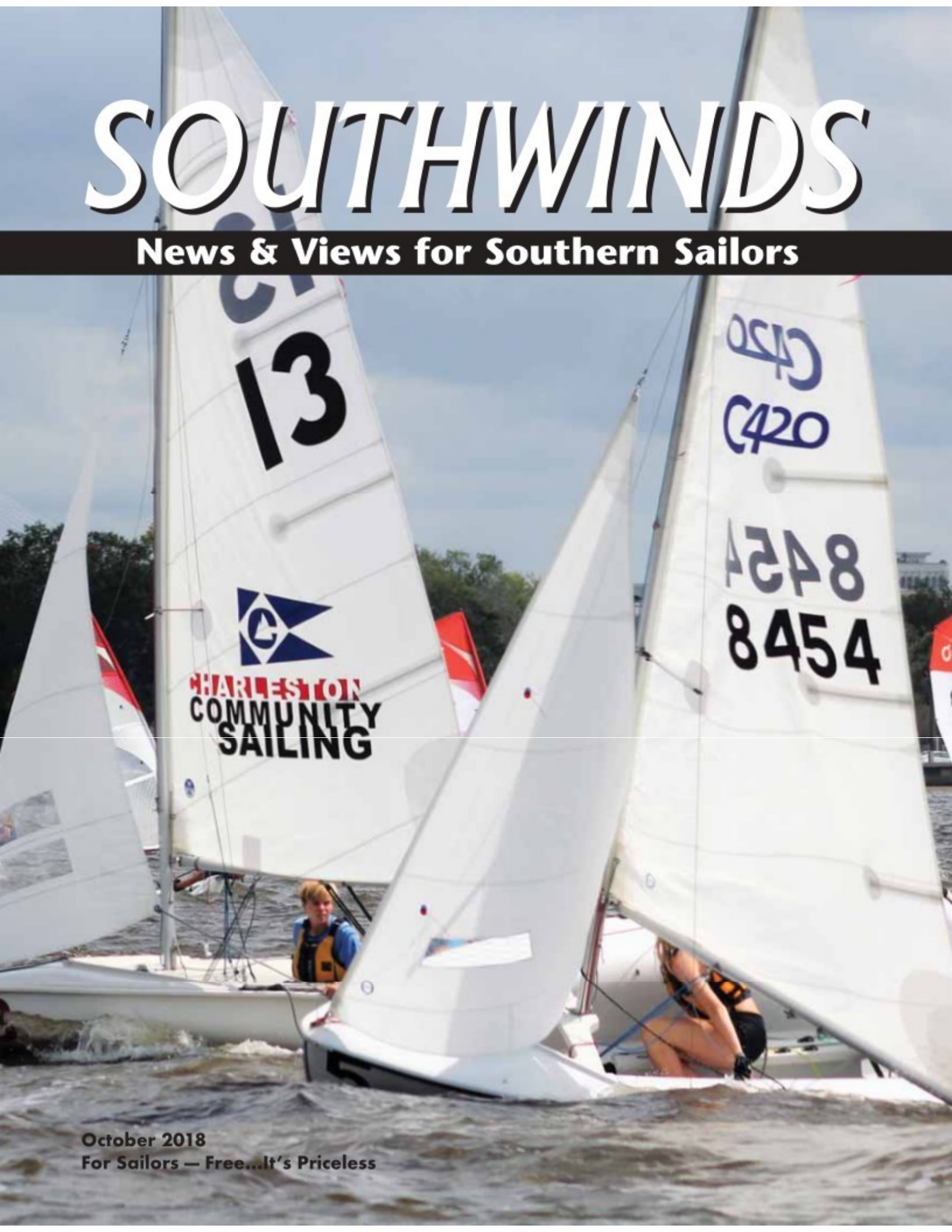


SOUTHWINDS

News & Views for Southern Sailors



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For Sailors — Free...It's Priceless

Crushing it Community Style

By Dan Dickison

Cover: Strong breezes challenged the competitors at Charleston Community Sailing's recent Community Cup. Photo by Priscilla Parker.

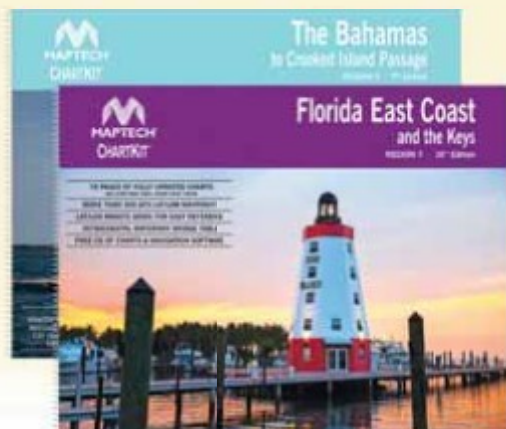
One of the Southeast's most successful sailing programs has been training and influencing young sailors—and adults—for nearly two decades.

Tucked into a remote corner of the Charleston City Marina, nearly beneath a highway overpass and alongside a tidal marsh, sits a modest collection of floating docks. At a glance, you couldn't know the significance that this little station represents. Jammed into fewer than 2,000 square feet of dock space are a fleet of 420s, a rack of standup paddleboards, a few Open Bics and a dozen Optimist prams, a handful of small powerboats and some storage areas for life jackets, rudders, sails, daggerboards and the like. This is the home of Charleston Community Sailing, Inc.—the epicenter for much of the progress that's been achieved in growing the sport of sailing in the Carolina Lowcountry over the past 20 years.



Charleston Community Sailing docks. Jammed into fewer than 2,000 square feet of dock space are a fleet of 420s, a rack of standup paddleboards, a few Open Bics and a dozen Optimist prams, a handful of small powerboats and some storage areas for life jackets, rudders, sails, daggerboards and the like. Photo by Priscilla Parker.

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When *SOUTHWINDS* last featured CCS, as some devotees call it (see *SOUTHWINDS*, December 2016 in Back Issues at www.southwindsmagazine.com), we wrote “the overwhelming majority of the programming that CCS conducts...is for younger sailors.... That begins with a range of instructional classes for youngsters ages 5 through 15. On top of that, CCS staff also conduct specialized programs, including Buddy Sail (which pairs kids from the local Boys and Girls Club with competent teens for an afternoon of sailing; STEM education (which uses sailing as an educational platform for middle schoolers, in both the classroom and on the water); Open Sail (one night a week in Optis and Open Bics); and Saturday Sails (open to all kids who have completed one or more of the organization's instructional courses).”

All of that is still true today, says Jessica Koenig, who has been the nonprofit's executive director since 2007. And, in the last two years, the organization has amplified its scope of programs. It now offers keelboat opportunities for adults aboard two J/24s that were donated by local owners. (Beginner sailing courses, family outings and introductory sails for neophytes highlight the adult menu.) In addition, the Women on the Water program now includes learn-to-sail classes and outings aboard various vessels in the organization's fleet.

“We've experienced a lot of growth in recent years,” says Koenig. “It's pretty impressive to consider that the organization started out 19 years ago with just six donated boats and a little bit of dock space. We've run approximately 19,000 people—most of them juniors—through our programs since then. Aside from the junior programs, we now offer Women on the Water classes during the day and even have an all-women team racing in CORA events (Charleston Ocean

The Open Bic fleet gets under way at the Charleston Community Cup. Photo by Priscilla Parker.



Racing Association) aboard one of our J/24s. In addition, we've added a Girls on the Water program."

That last one, which takes place once a week after school, helps to build confidence for and empower middle and high school girls who already know how to handle a boat, but want to hone their sailing skills. "Our Women on the Water program was so successful," Koenig explains, "that we took the same model and applied it for girls. The primary focus is on having fun and continuing to develop a high level of comfort and proficiency on the water." Though the program is still relatively new, Koenig says that six to 10 girls participate each week.

The impact of this program takes on various forms. Koenig mentions two high school girls who have assisted as interns. "Those two are both sailing instructors," she says, "and they used the program as the basis for their senior thesis in high school. They studied how it empowers young girls, delivering confidence and self-esteem. And that came out of their urge to share with others the passion they have for this sport."

And passion, it appears, exists at the root of CCS' many successes. The majority of the 10 individuals who make up the organization's board of directors are active racing sailors, committed to the vitality of their local sailing scene by working to make the sport accessible to all. The board's most recent hire—Program Director Kate O'Donnell—is also an active racing sailor who happens to have a background in youth and college sailing programs.

All of the momentum that Koenig and her CCS colleagues are building was on display recently at what has become the organization's signature event—the Charleston Community Cup. Part fierce competition, part laidback fun, this event is described by Koenig as "an opportunity to bring the community together and celebrate sailing."

The third annual edition of the Community Cup began on Friday evening, August 24, when a cadre of local boat owners hosted CCS juniors on board their sailboats for a casual around-the-buoys race. Six boats participated, with four to seven youngsters on board each one. Afterward, the participants were treated to an ice cream social. The following day, a collection of volunteers from the local sailing community helped the organization stage a series of races for the kids, using CCS' Optis, Open Bics and 420s. Despite nearly 20 knots of breeze and occasionally big chop, the racers had a ball logging a total of 17 races. (Check out the Day 2 video on the CCS Facebook page.) And all that activity was followed by dinner and an awards ceremony at the Charleston Yacht Club.

Days later, Koenig praised the event's family-friendly nature and the impact it has on young sailors. "We had more than double the participation compared to the year before," she offered, "and the highlight was definitely the big boat race. Nearly half the junior sailors at the event participated."

As the summer days slip away and fall overtakes the Lowcountry, Koenig, O'Donnell and CCS will continue orchestrating their full schedule of programs, which includes hosting local high school racing team practices and regattas. Then, on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, they'll stage another community gathering—the organization's largest annual fundraiser—an oyster roast. This will be 12th annual edition of this event. It's sure to be well attended, and sure to help support one of the most engaging and effective sailing incubators in the region.

Find out more about Charleston Community Sailing at www.charlestoncommunitysailing.org.

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