

Local Yacht Club Marks Impressive Milestone

250th Belleville-area youth to benefit from sailing bursary this summer



Chris Waller

A father's tribute to his son is about to introduce its 250th Belleville-area youth to the joys of sailing.

Trevor Waller's son, Christopher Waller, was born with hemophilia in 1968.

As Chris grew older, Trevor began looking for a way to keep him active. "He couldn't play football, even though he wanted to," Trevor recalls. "Any sport that involved running was hard on his lungs. We lived on the bay shore at the time, and we watched the sailors sail past our house in the evenings. I thought it might be good for him."

And so, when Chris was four years old, Trevor joined the Bay of Quinte Yacht Club and introduced his son to sailing. He took to it immediately. "We bought a sailboat and he learned to sail," said Trevor. "He would take the boat out on his own and spend hours on the bay. He loved the freedom of sailing, the tranquility."

Chris died in 1987, at age 19. The following year, his parents decided to honour his memory by starting a memorial fund at the Yacht Club. "We knew how important sailing was to Chris, what a difference it made in his life, and we wanted to do the same thing for other children," Trevor said.

In its first year, Chris Waller Fund made it possible for two area children from low-income families to attend the Yacht Club's Junior Sailing Program, a summer sailing school that runs four two-week sessions in July and August.

Since then, the fund has supported the Chris Waller Junior Sailing Bursary, enabling area kids to explore a sport that they wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to enjoy. "At the beginning, I just reached out to friends who worked in the schools to see if they knew of any children who might be interested," Trevor said. "Since then we've built relationships with local agencies -- Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Hastings Children's Aid Society, the Sea Cadets, and others."

Over the years, other club members learned about the bursary and have contributed to the fund as well. As a result, 248 area children have spent two to four weeks learning to sail and developing new skills, confidence, and opportunities that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. Students learn collaboration and team-building skills, responsibility, and sailing skills that will stay with them for the rest of their lives, while they enjoy their summer days on the Bay of Quinte.

After managing the fund for 30 years and raising more than \$100,000 in bursary money, Trevor Waller has decided to step down and hand the reins over to the Bay of Quinte Yacht Club's board of directors.

The board is keeping the fund alive, and this summer, the club will welcome as many as 8 new Chris Waller Bursary recipients, including its 250th.