

## **Yacht Club Leadership Seminar – January 17, 2026**

### **Morning Session - Treasurer and Membership Issues**

#### **Yacht Club Challenges and Strategies**

The meeting began with introductions from various yacht club representatives, including Candace Porter, moderator, who outlined her experience and role in the ILYA Education Committee and service as Past Commodore. Participants discussed challenges faced by their clubs, such as maintaining sailing participation among youth and managing social memberships. Pistakee highlighted their legal battle with the Village of Johnsburg over boat storage, which has cost the club \$200,000 in legal fees to date. Tom Morris, president of Delavan Lake Yacht Club, shared his club's structure and challenges, emphasizing the need to engage young sailors. The group as a whole explored strategies for incorporating sailors from sailing schools into yacht club activities and discussed the importance of promoting sailing to young people in an era of increased distractions. Treasurer efficiencies and Board continuity were a common concern amongst the majority of clubs. All but two clubs employed Clubspot as the platform to manage operations. Categories and recruitment of membership was a common discussion throughout all the topics.

#### **Yacht Club Membership Growth Strategies**

The meeting brought together representatives from various yacht clubs to discuss challenges and strategies for maintaining and growing their memberships, particularly in sailing. Participants shared their experiences with recruitment, retention, and community building, highlighting issues such as an aging membership, the need for new young members, and the importance of consistent leadership. They also discussed the role of social members in funding sailing activities and the challenges of keeping young sailors involved as they transition into adulthood. The group agreed to exchange contact information and explore best practices in areas like building projects, restaurant operations, and board continuity. Candace mentioned an article from [Scuttlebutt](#) reporting on the trends in YC health – mainly aging of members, decrease in boat ownership.

#### **Yacht Club Financial Management Systems**

The group discussed membership and financial operations at various yacht clubs, with participants sharing details about Lake Beulah, Pewaukee, Delavan and Geneva's accounting processes. Each lake explored different approaches to managing club finances, including the use of ClubSpot software with full volunteers or software and full-time bookkeepers. Lake Beulah explained how they have reduced administrative hours significantly weekly through electronic deposits and automated categorization, integration with Clubspot, bank and Quickbooks. The discussion highlighted the importance of efficient financial management systems for yacht clubs, with a focus on reducing manual work and improving accuracy through technology.

## **ClubSpot Integration and Management**

Pewaukee and Beulah led the discussion of the integration of ClubSpot with QuickBooks Online and their banking systems, emphasizing the importance of correct setup for seamless data flow. The group highlighted the benefits of ClubSpot's features, such as event registration, regatta scoring, and member management, while others mentioned the high costs for smaller clubs that previously performed all tasks with volunteer labor. ClubSpot setup, along with assistance from treasurers from other lakes might benefit those entering the conversion to more reliance on technology. Delavan shared insights into managing facilities, restaurant and member rental spaces through ClubSpot, noting its efficiency in streamlining operations. Beulah used the reservation of pickleball and tennis courts through Clubspot.

## **Yacht Club Membership Fee Structures**

The group discussed membership and boat fees at various yacht clubs. Lakes shared fees for family membership and singles, with different categories for youth and seniors or people who utilized a club for other reasons than sailing. Other clubs described their fee structures, with some charging boat registration fees and dry sail fees. The discussion touched on how different clubs handle family memberships, associate memberships, and transitions between membership categories. There did seem to be consensus that a youth category is protected to keep young adults active in the club. Several clubs have associate memberships that are non-voting, an effort to keep control of the clubs among sailors and protect the sailing mission and culture. Some clubs have multiple layers such as reduced dues for legacy members such as adult children up to a certain age or dues staggered over years before they reach the full amount to retain young adult members. Two clubs mentioned a youth membership for those who are in sailing school and participating in yacht club youth racing. They offered free participation to the entire family for a designated time with the youth membership.

## **Lake Geneva and Delavan Yacht Club Membership**

Kristin Gannon, commodore at Lake Geneva Yacht Club, discussed their membership structure, including initiation fees, regular dues, and various membership categories such as junior, intermediate, associate, and sailing supporter. She emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between social and sailing members, noting that associate members do not have voting rights but can transition to regular membership if they demonstrate sailing involvement. Interestingly, they have stopped admitting associate members for now and will re-evaluate that category. Kristin highlighted the club's efforts to encourage sailing participation, such as partnerships with sailing schools and race teams. Delavan encourages sailing by managing a membership cap to ensure sailing members maintain a significant presence. Potential members with a sailboat intending to compete move to the top of the waiting list with preferred entry into the club. They have potential members learning on race committee to raise their listing on the waitlist.

## **Engaging Non-Sailors in Sailing Initiatives**

Several clubs have initiatives to engage non-sailors and convert them into sailing enthusiasts, highlighting successful programs such as "Sip and Sail" and community sailing events. Several clubs emphasize the importance of creating opportunities for people of all ages to participate in sailing, including through adult sailing lessons and social sailing nights. People from all clubs mentioned the need to cultivate new race officers and encourage active participation from associate members to strengthen the sailing community.

### **Yacht Club Membership Models Discussion**

The group discussed membership and operational challenges at yacht clubs, with Delavan sharing its successful approach of requiring new members to complete specific assignments before joining. They explored different membership models, including a new youth family trial membership, and discussed the challenges of managing a balance between social and sailing memberships. Pewaukee recently established a Youth Sailor Family Membership for families with a child or children participating in sailing school or competing on a youth fleet. This non-voting membership is available for up to two years. The conversation concluded with a review of treasurer responsibilities, including insurance requirements, tax filings, and the implementation of credit card fees to reduce processing charges.

### **ClubSpot Payment and Communication Updates**

The group discussed payment processing options, with club members explaining their experience with credit card fees and ACH payments. They reviewed how ClubSpot's membership management system has evolved over time, including online applications and liability waivers now included. The discussion touched on communication methods with members, noting that while younger members prefer digital platforms, older members often prefer text messaging.

Candace discussed the need for multiple users in a system, whether communication, financial, scheduling or event management. She highlighted the need for multiple administrators to handle emergencies and manage access to financial systems to assure coverage at all times in a volunteer-run organization. This is easily accomplished in Clubspot. Quickbooks Online allows for multiple users which allows the treasurer's tasks to be delegated, i.e. segregation of revenue and expense tasks to unburden the volunteer hours.

### **Payment collection**

Credit cards and/or sales tax payments are being borne by the user, in most cases. Clubs are utilizing credit cards and ACH systems. ACH is markedly lower cost if the user allows the club to connect with a bank.

One club's experience has been to bill more regularly rather than to allow monthly accumulation of charges. Members seem to recall the charges if the billing period is closer to the generation of the charge.

## Notes from the morning session:

- Clubs using ClubSpot (e.g. Pine Lake, Pewaukee, Beulah, Delavan, Geneva, Nagawicka, LaBelle etc.) may identify individuals who would be willing to troubleshoot others or a club may request a group session through the education committee.
- Pewaukee and Beulah use an accounting firm which has integrated Clubspot with banking and accounting programs:

***Margie Smith at Andaloro, Smith & Krueger, LLP***

***N19 W24200 Riverwood Drive, Suite 310***

***Waukesha, WI 53188***

***Phone: (262) 544-2000***

***Fax: (262) 544-2060***

***info@askcpas.com***

- Beulah past treasurer Maggie Smith (not related to above) may be available to schedule a session for assistance with ClubSpot setup, especially regarding categorization and integration with QuickBooks/bank for Nagawicka. Contact: Candace Porter.
- Clubs using Regatta Network or other platforms may convert to Clubspot with easy migration from current website and membership data.
- [Dave Berg](#) is also a strong resource. The ILYA and Lake Beulah were among the first customers of Clubspot. They are nearly seven years on the platform. The initial administrative team was most responsive in the early development of the program to requests from the ILYA and Beulah; hence the tasks our ILYA clubs regularly use are present in the system.
- Clubs with questions about legal/liability issues for offsite events with alcohol: Contact Minnetonka or other clubs who do not have functional bars for advice on event structure and liability.
- Clubs needing to update or streamline membership category structures: Review bylaws and consider adopting or adapting membership models discussed (e.g. youth family trial membership, associate/sailing member distinctions). – use contact list of the participants at this seminar to request bylaws from participating lakes. While bylaws may be posted on club websites, they might be behind “member only” areas
- Clubs interested in implementing ACH payments to reduce credit card fees: Test ACH deposit timing with current bank and consider offering ACH as a membership payment option. Several clubs are now using ACH to get lower processing charges (now at 0.8% with only few day deposit into account).
- Clubs interested in on-the-water race official/pro training: Contact Inland Lake Yachting Association Education page on website for materials and request training resources. The ILYA

hosts general classes, does individual visits, announces US Sailing more formal certification classes and plans the development of on-the-water instruction in the 2026 season.

## **Afternoon session - Sailing School and Volunteer discussions**

### **Quick recap**

The discussion focused on sailing school operations, challenges, and strategies across various lake clubs. The discussion highlighted issues such as board support for sailing coaches, curriculum standardization, and the need for adult supervision in sailing schools and the importance of maintaining a supportive environment for coaches and students. Participants shared successful models, including Geneva's community sailing programs and Pewaukee's volunteer-driven food service at regattas. The conversation also covered fundraising ideas, membership donation options, as well as volunteer engagement strategies. Clubs discussed the challenges of balancing volunteer expectations with paid staff. The conversation ended with reflections on the evolving nature of club operations and the need for continued adaptation to changing membership dynamics.

### **Summary**

#### **Sailing School Governance and Support**

Candace led a discussion about sailing school challenges, focusing on board governance and coach management. She highlighted the difficulty of entrusting education to 18-year-old coaches who must face parental expectations and suggested that boards could better support coaches by providing clearer direction and communication. The group discussed the role of on-site directors, with examples shared about successful management approaches. The group challenged participants to evaluate how their boards could improve support for sailing school coaches and meet higher parental expectations for coaching quality.

#### **Sailing Program Success and Challenges**

Several clubs mentioned the success of their sailing program, which includes a “parent of the day” system and an adult-supervised program utilizing retired or available adults to assist. US Sailing's marketplace has a list of coaches but that system is rarely utilized in ILYA clubs. The ILYA does use Emily Barkow Veinot to teach courses at the entry level coach and Level 1 US Sailing coach level annually in the spring.

#### **Lake Country Sailing Association Model**

Heather Harken presented information about the newly developed Lake Country Sailing, prompted by the challenges in competing with other lakes for coaches and students especially in light of the geographic proximity of so many clubs along the I94 corridor. That led to a discussion about potentially sharing resources and standardizing coaching and curriculum materials across sailing clubs to improve participation and compensation for coaches in the Lake Country area.

Heather discussed the Lake Country Sailing Association model (Pewaukee, LaBelle, North, Beaver, Pine and Okauchee), which aims to improve instruction and community impact by sharing resources, standardizing curriculum, and collaborating among lakes. Challenges include inconsistent curriculum, limited coaching networks, and volunteer burnout. The association is considering establishing a 501(c)(3) umbrella program to streamline operations and facilitate resource sharing. While some lakes are involved, others like Cedar, Beulah, Delavan, Geneva and Oshkosh remain hesitant, concerned about preserving their identities and maintaining local adult sailors and fleets longterm. The model has shown promise in its first year, with better coaching and increased participation, though oversight remains a challenge.

### **Other ILYA Club Sailing School Programs**

Kristin Gannon discussed the Geneva Lake Sailing School's programs, including their sailing camps and junior sailing programs. Geneva has a youth membership for those who are attending the GLSS classes or the Buddy Melges Racing Team fall lessons. Cedar highlighted the success of their outreach efforts, led by Stephen and Nicole Boemer, in attracting and retaining new sailors. Annually the Boemers reach out to every sailing school family from the preceding year to invite them back, which encourages a progression of skill for the students. Cedar's school offers various sailing options for different age groups and skill levels, using a mix of owned and rented boats. Cedar is unique, and successful, in teaching in X boats to build on the socialization between skipper and crew rather than the singlehanded Optimist Dinghy use as a trainer.

The discussion touched on challenges faced by sailing schools in recruiting and retaining students, as well as the importance of community involvement and boat ownership in sustaining sailing programs.

### **Boat Ownership Models in Sailing Clubs**

The group mentioned the unique ILYA model of private boat ownership at sailing clubs, comparing it to other situations in which clubs own the boats, which is the more prevalent custom throughout the nation. Participants talked about the sailing school's boat inventory, including the Opti, X, and Melges 15, and mentioned the return of the Laser back on Lake Geneva. The conversation touched on the rising cost of boats, with Candace recalling the Opti class's efforts to keep it affordable in the 1990s, and the current high-tech, expensive options available today. The private ownership model assures continuity, improved quality of boats sailed but may appear prohibitive to families entering the sport.

## **Fundraising Event**

The group briefly discussed fundraising ideas, focusing on a PLSS meat raffle held during this discussion. (It was later learned the meat raffle earned several thousand dollars.) They explored the logistics and potential revenue of this event, comparing it to other successful fundraising activities such as auctions and silent auctions. Geneva has a monthly donation program which has been in place for 10 years in which \$10 is added to every member's monthly bill. Members have the ability to opt out. Most members just allow the monthly donation to the sailing school to continue.

## **Volunteer Trends in Sailing Clubs**

The group discussed the changing nature of volunteerism, noting that many clubs are moving away from purely volunteer-based operations to hiring staff, which has led to increased costs and higher dues. At Beulah, members are still required to volunteer for one social event per year. Other clubs are seeing the same trend of fewer members, with less time or inclination to volunteer. Many clubs have discussed allowing members to buy out of their volunteer duty; none have instituted it. Geneva is large with a hired staff but continues to highlight the importance of volunteer incentive. They host a volunteer dinner and issue race committee credits. Nearly every club is reviewing its associate membership programs to better integrate new members into volunteering. Two clubs in particular welcomed the parents of sailing school students for a temporary membership and actively engaged them in volunteer opportunities to "teach" the culture of the club.

## **Systems to assist with continuity**

The discussion focused on volunteer management and organizational improvements at a sailing club. The group discussed their efforts to establish better documentation systems, including job descriptions stored in Google Docs or listed in bylaws and a calendar that tracks monthly board responsibilities. The group explored the use of Sign Up Genius for volunteer coordination, with several clubs sharing experience using it for race committee scheduling and regattas. They discussed challenges with volunteer retention and the need to break up closed groups that dominated certain activities, for instance longstanding race committee teams or members who like to work together socially.

## **Volunteer Management and Organizational Improvements**

Group members discussed the volunteer management and organizational improvements that improve the continuity for ever-changing boards. Geneva noted that 92 people volunteered for race committee last year, which required coordination, management of last minute substitutes, education, etc. Implementing committees to better manage responsibilities and follow up on volunteer commitments, which they had not been doing previously, improves the transfer of procedures year to year. Individuals mentioned the need to update and digitize job descriptions to ensure better documentation and accessibility. But storage of the documents or volunteer

assignments is essential. Additionally, the group emphasized the importance of having clear policies and procedures, which are now being stored on their website to prevent loss of important documents, quick access and a history of action taken by boards.

### **Sign Up Genius Volunteer Management**

Geneva discussed the use of Sign Up Genius for volunteer management, highlighting its ability to handle multiple events, track volunteer participation, and send reminders. The discussion emphasized its potential to encourage broader involvement by breaking up closed groups and creating records for event planning. Candace also shared a personal experience where Sign Up Genius was crucial in managing volunteer shifts during an ILYA Championship regatta, when more than 400 two-hour slots were required to host the event to cover food, boat management, race committee, clean up shifts.

### **Notes**

- Lake Country Sailing Association will continue development of the proposed (501(c)(3)umbrella program structure, including evaluating legal/financial configurations for different types of clubs (charities, foundations, schools) and determining buy-in/percentage responsibilities for equipment and funding. They will share this info with interested other lakes who might be considering forming a consortium. Contact [Coye Harrett](#) of Okauchee.
- Look for these ILYA/US Sailing offerings in Scowlines
  1. Emilie Barkow Veinot -First-year coach training course (last weekend of April/first weekend of May), location TBD
  2. March Zoom sessions on Protest Procedures
  3. April – John Strassman roundtable
  4. May-June – On the water race committee hands on training
  5. Vakaros training
  6. Level I US Sailing Certification Class
  7. US Sailing Club race officer training
  8. US Sailing club judge training