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OFFSHORE SAILING SCHOOL HOSTS ANNUAL 'YOU CAN SAIL' WOMEN'S ESCAPE WEEK

Fort Myers, FL (July, 2003) Twenty-seven women recently gathered at South Seas Resort on beautiful Captiva Island, Florida to experience Offshore Sailing School's Annual Women's Escape Week, a unique program focused on enhancing women's experience and skill as sailors. The week's instruction included a choice of Learn to Sail, Bareboat Preparation or Performance Sailing classes. Students enrolled with a desire to gain more confidence, a sense of accomplishment, and US SAILING certification.

The event is all about empowerment, skill and fun. Women take the helm and crew the boats, actively participating in each role. Kathy Romano, US SAILING certified instructor, explained how well women work together as a team. "They're not afraid to ask questions," says Kathy, "and when they get out on the water, they have more confidence." She went on to say, "Women are eager to help each other and carry out a task. In contrast, men have stronger opinions on how things should be done and sometimes challenge direction, while women seem to be relaxed with taking direction."

The May session had a diverse group of participants from around the country ranging in age from 15 to 61. Class rosters included a retired federal agent, gourmet coffee store owner, elephant handler, interior designer, massage therapist, international consultant, real estate agent, urban planner, book seller, students, two lawyers and a former restaurateur.

Linda Spear, a CPA from Norfolk, Virginia was searching for an "appropriate diversion" after a long tax season,...something to "clear all the cobwebs and create a clean slate" from her job as an accountant. "Taking a vacation where you sit in a lounge chair doesn't do that," said Linda. "The Learn to Sail course was very mentally stimulating. It was a great way to get the release I was looking for."

Each morning began with classroom instruction followed by time on the water aboard the award-winning Colgate 26 sailboat, chosen by the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis as a training vessel. The Learn to Sail course is for those new to sailing or wanting to improve basic skills, knowledge and confidence. Women with basic sailing skills who desire increased competence on bigger boats take Bareboat Cruising Preparation, and those who want to hone their racing skills take the Performance Sailing course. By the end of the week, students sail without instructors aboard, and the grand finale is a formal awards banquet.

A.J. Curran, a retired attorney and mother of four daughters from Chicago, took the Performance Sailing course. She sails big boats on Lake Michigan but at times encounters resistance when trying to get a position aboard as crew for a race. “As a woman, you really have to be able to prove yourself worthy to get a spot on a racing boat,” said A.J. “By taking Performance Sailing, I hope to add another dimension to my passion for sailing by getting more invitations for big boat racing.”

When not engaged in formal instruction, students could sign up for small boat clinics to improve single-handed skills on smaller Hunter 90’s. Twice a week all students were invited to participate in clinics – one on knots and line splicing, taught by Diana Smith, president of the National Women’s Sailing Association, (NWSA) and a navigation workshop taught by Michelle Boggs, Offshore’s Liberty Landing, New Jersey Branch Manager. Even though attendance during the evening clinics was “optional,” the classroom was packed.

“Women bond and men compete,” said Diana, summing up the difference in gender sailing styles. The NWSA was founded in 1990 by Doris Colgate, CEO of Offshore Sailing School, who recruited 12 women to help market the organization to women who sail or want to learn. Their mission is to enrich the lives of women and girls through education and access to the sport of sailing. The NWSA has 300 members, conducts educational and networking opportunities for adult members, and provides sailing experiences that introduce opportunities for positive life choices for at-risk girls. The NWSA is also introducing career paths and opportunities that involve marine-related science, math and technology. “The collaboration between Offshore Sailing School and the NWSA is very strong,” continued Diana. “Our directions are similar because we’re both destined to accomplish the same goals.”

Carolyn Jahde who sells real estate in Lincoln, Nebraska, took the Performance Sailing course. After falling in love with her “sailor-husband” 10 years ago at a real estate conference, she too caught the sailing bug. They sail their 24’ Neptune on a reservoir lake in Nebraska, but

their goal is to buy a big boat and do a circumnavigation. “This course was a Christmas present from my husband,” said Carolyn. “Now I’ll be able to handle the boat without him telling me what to do.”

Carolyn explained with heartfelt expression the unbelievable bonding she had experienced with the other three women in her group. “Even though we only met a week ago and live in different parts of the country with very diverse backgrounds, we’ve shared major secrets,” she whispered with a smile. “We call them the divine secrets of the ‘jibe-ho’ sisterhood.”

Susan Ford from Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, also took the Performance Sailing Course. She is currently restoring two sailboats and is racing on an all women’s crew in the Charleston to Bermuda Race. What is she sailing on? A Bermuda 40, of course! Susan is married, but her husband is not as involved as she is in big boat racing. “He likes harbor racing, and I like blue water sailing.” Now, after taking Performance Sailing and spending so much time on a Colgate 26, she has “fallen in love” with small boat sailing. She and her husband are retired from their restaurant business.

Offshore Sailing School, founded in 1964 by Steve and Doris Colgate, has more than 100,000 graduates who have gone on to enjoy a lifetime of sailing. “It’s a sport and leisure activity that anyone can do at any age,” says Doris Colgate. “Some women take the course just to discover another activity; others to pursue their dream.” Due to popular demand, a series of women-only courses have been added to the schedule through 2004, including Live Aboard Cruising courses in the British Virgin Islands, and a Women’s Spa-Sail Escape week in the Florida Keys. Call the school for details.

Offshore has a variety of courses for all levels of experience ranging from Learn to Sail for beginners to advanced cruising and racing. The school has seven locations including the Florida Keys, St. Petersburg and Captiva Island on Florida’s west coast, New Jersey, New York, Newport, Rhode Island, and the British Virgin Islands. For more information, contact Offshore Sailing School at 888-567-2211 or visit www.offshore-sailing.com.

(Editor’s note: For high-resolution digital images to accompany this article, please contact Mary Orme at mary@affinitydesign1.com or 727-733-9332. A wide selection of images are available, in addition to the attached samples.)

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