

March 2021



# on the Move

*Local maritime news, events and history from the Chicago Maritime Museum*

## South Side Siblings Make Sailing Accessible to City Kids



(Karen and Joey Harris as teens sailing at Columbia Yacht Club.)

### *Karen and Joey Harris Devoted to Breaking Down Lakefront Barriers*

Currie Metro High School freshman, Grace O'Neil, remembers vividly the first day she sailed on Lake Michigan at age eight.

"It was an extremely windy day, and the instructors were trying to teach us how to jibe and tack, but all I could think was that I was going to fall in the water," she recalls.

Today, this fourteen-year-old South Sider is a member of the **US Sailing Youth Advisory Board**. Grace is also an instructor-in-training in Jackson Park Yacht Club Foundation's (JPYC) youth sailing program and competes on its 420 Race Team.



“Nowadays, I feel completely confident at the helm of a sailboat. I’ve learned so much - not just about sailing, but certain life skills like overcoming fear, teamwork, clear communications and believing in myself.”

Grace attributes much of her success in sailing to two Chicago siblings, Karen and Joey Harris. Although previously considered a leisure pastime only available to affluent whites, sailing is becoming increasingly accessible to minorities thanks to the efforts of people like Karen and Joey.

Raised near the lakefront in Hyde Park, the Harris kids recognized the value of sailing at an early age. Their mother, a Chicago Public School teacher - determined to keep her children engaged and active during the summer months -- gave them a choice: summer school or sailing school. They chose the latter and never looked back.

Today, Joey is the manager of sailing for the Chicago Park District. Without a doubt, Chicago’s most beloved youth sailing instructor, Joey is a regular fixture each summer at Burnham Harbor. His sister Karen is past commodore of Chicago’s most diverse yacht club, Jackson Park Yacht Club, and the current president of JYPC Foundation. Together, the two siblings devote much of their time promoting and ensuring accessibility to sailing for young city kids.

Grace first met Joey through the **America’s Cup Endeavor Program** in Chicago, which introduces students to sailing as a way to learn about science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM). Joey’s career has provided so many people with the opportunity to sail that, in 2019, he was inducted into the **Lake Michigan Sailing Hall of Fame**.

Joey graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 1992 where he was on the sailing team and was Freshman Team Captain. His professional sailing career began at Columbia Yacht Club as director of sailing – the same place where he and his sister learned to sail. Since then, Joey has coached and directed sailing programs throughout the United States, from San Francisco to Grosse Pointe to Lake Forest, before landing back home at the Chicago Park District in 2009.

Today, Joey oversees the **Judd Goldman Community Sailing Program**, an initiative he helped develop with the merging of the Chicago Park District Rainbow Fleet and the Judd Goldman Adaptive Sailing Program.

“Unlike basketball, where it’s easy to join a neighborhood game at the local park, sailing has perceived barriers,” says Joey. “City kids see no clear path to that sailboat out on the lakefront. That’s why it’s important to reach out to these youngsters with programs that offer accessibility to sailing.”

Several summers after completing the Endeavor program, Grace met Joey’s older sister Karen. Through Karen’s efforts to expand the **JPYC Foundation**, Grace was offered a no-cost scholarship to their junior sailing program.



(Kids enjoying JPYC youth sailing program.)

A Harvard Law School graduate (Princeton undergrad), Karen is the quintessential overachiever. However, despite her current position as general counsel for the Illinois Health and Hospital Association (currently overseeing the legal aspects of COVID-19 vaccine rollouts for some 200-plus hospitals), Karen takes the time to mentor young people like Grace. Recent recipient of the US Sailing’s 2020 Outstanding Organizational Leader, Karen also sails the yearly Chicago to Mackinac Race on **Mise en Place**, a Beneteau Oceanis 381 owned by Paul Thompson, another former commodore of Jackson Park Yacht Club. And, she serves as the interim chair of **US Sailing’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee**.

“Sailing is the great equalizer,” says Karen. “It enables people of all incomes and races to leave their troubles on shore and face the elements. It’s just you, your team, and the wind.”

For young sailors like Grace, her experiences on the lake can have a big impact on her future.

"I already know I'm smart, but I can improve other skills through sailing," she says. "Like tamping down emotions in stressful situations to convey and clear and concise messages."

Growing stronger on the water is an experience the Harris siblings generously promote and share with the next generation of Chicago sailors.

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## Museum Redesign in the Works

While the Chicago Maritime Museum hopes to reopen its doors to the public this summer, museum volunteers and staff have been busy working on a redesign of exhibit space that is sure to delight and engage CMM patrons.



The museum has retained Lafferty van Heest and Associates, a full-service exhibit design firm that specializes in maritime exhibit design. The partners William Lafferty and Valerie Olson van Heest are Chicago natives and maritime historians.

"In this day of push-button technology, CMM must offer reasons to go beyond the instant Google search to learn more about local maritime history" says Valerie. "We do this by creating immersive and engaging exhibits"

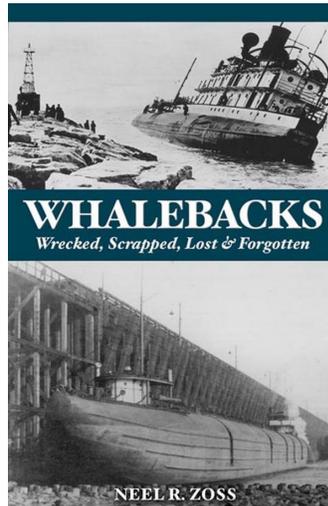
LvH will be developing a schematic design for completion of the museum that will include curatorial content, image and artifact selection, 3-D renderings, and budgets that will be used by the CMM board to seek funding.

It is anticipated that some work will be completed for the summer of 2021 and the bulk of the museum redesign complete by 2022. More details to come in the April *On the Move* issue.

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## Virtual Third Friday, March 19 "The History of McDougall's Whalebacks"

During the last years of the 19th century, Duluth Harbor was the birthplace of a bold, innovative, and decidedly odd-looking class of Great Lakes barges and steamships known as whalebacks. Capt. Alexander McDougall and his American Steel Barge Company built the curved-decked, snout-nosed whalebacks on the shores of Lake Superior. The vessels were a radical departure, in design, form, and construction, from the standard shipbuilding concepts of the era.



Neel Zoss has spent more than 30 years researching whaleback barges and steamships for his book, *McDougall's Great Lakes Whalebacks, and Whalebacks: Wrecked Scrapped Lost and Forgotten*.

Join us for CMM's virtual Third Friday on March 19 starting at 7:00 p.m.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. Questions, please contact 312-718-7245.

[Register for the Lecture](#)

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## Chicago's Lakefront Tops Endangered List



The Chicago lakefront, declared in 1836 to remain “forever open, clear and free,” could be permanently altered by new proposals.

[Read More Here](#)

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## **CMM's Tom Kastle, Renowned Shanty Singer, Featured on WTTW**



Learn why Chicago was ahead of the Tik-Tok trend.

[Read More Here](#)

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**Project to**

# Prevent Asian Carp in Lake Michigan Project Moves Forward



The next phase of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project for the Brandon Road Lock and Dam near Joliet is moving ahead after state and federal funding has been secured.

[Read Article Here](#)

## Maritime Event Calendar

Check out local maritime events at the Chicago Maritime Museum [website calendar page](#).

Submit maritime events in the Chicagoland area or story ideas to Mary Ann O'Rourke at [maorourke58@gmail.com](mailto:maorourke58@gmail.com).

Ready to join or renew your membership?  
Information about our membership offers can be found [here](#).  
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*We hope you've enjoyed our monthly e-newsletter, On the Move.*

