The Fight Against Plastic

Sailboats are uniquely suited and on the front line of this important battle

After issuing over a million certifications in over 30 years of operation, the American Sailing Association understands that there is more to their role in the world of sailing than ensuring students have solid educational fundamentals. Of course, that's at the top of the list, but as an organization so directly connected to the world's oceans, the ASA is extremely mindful of what condition those oceans are in and how their influence/support can have an effect.

While there are more than a few worthy areas on which to focus when it comes to environmental causes, the ASA is particularly concerned with plastic pollution because it happens to be an issue where the physical act of sailing has made a difference.

In the past two years, ASA has been associated with two science-based environmental groups that directly employed sailing to contend with the problematic and often tragic issue of toxic plastic pollution infesting our oceans. Young entrepreneur, Dutchman Boyan Slat, founder of The Ocean Cleanup, made a big noise when, at 19, he announced (via a Ted Talk) that he could clean up the world's oceans with a baffle system he invented. And when it came time to head to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch off the coast of Hawaii, the American Sailing Association was there to help raise awareness amongst sailors and participate in the Mega Expedition - the largest sailboat based scientific expedition ever staged.

"I honestly don't know if what Boyan is proposing will do what he hopes," said ASA founder Lenny Shabes. "But he's trying to do something about a serious problem and I respect and support that.

"It's not lost on us how fortunate we are," Shabes continued. "The ASA has gotten so much from the world of sailing through the decades and we feel it's our and all sailors' responsibility to give back."

Most recently, another sailboat driven organization battling the plastic crisis appeared on ASA's radar. They're called Plastic Change and have sailed far and wide on a 1959 cruiser made from the steel of Russian submarines.

This past year the crew of sailors and scientists came through the Mediterranean, across the Atlantic and on to Bermuda where they examined the North Atlantic gyre. They then sailed to the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal to the Galapagos Islands to Los Angeles, Cabo and finally an extended stay in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch where they examined the plastic there to deduce its origins.

Unlike Slat, who wants to mitigate the current reality, the Plastic Change folks are more interested in how much and what kind of plastic is there, so they can more effectively educate the world's industry and private citizenry on prevention methods.

"As an organization that teaches people to sail, it's meaningful to us that sailing is such a vital part of what they're doing," said Shabes. "It allows research to be done in an affordable way. I think it's safe to say, that without sailing this work just wouldn't get done as effectively."

ASA has also pushed a campaign among recreational sailors to keep a watch for floating plastic while out day sailing and pick it up when you see it.

"We should leave the oceans cleaner than when we found them," Shabes said smiling. "And it's a great way to practice your MOB drills!"

To learn more about these two organizations visit asa.com/oceancleanup & plasticchange.org
It's always inspiring when sailing goes beyond simple personal pleasure and becomes a conduit to matters of greater importance - matters bigger than we are and ones that need attention.

Sailboats can bring us to some amazing remote areas that only a rare and privileged few get to see and sometimes it's these places that change us forever.

Such is the case for Harriet and Tom Linskey who, while cruising the Caribbean, stumbled upon impoverished communities where the scarcity of books was causing widespread childhood illiteracy.

Taken aback by the situation, the couple took action and founded Hands Across the Sea, an organization that has addressed the dilemma and since its inception in 2007 has become the largest, most effective child literacy organization serving the Eastern Caribbean.

When the American Sailing Association found out about Hands Across the Sea, they immediately took action and have since raised over $60,000 through a sweepstakes program they created especially for the charity.

"It's heartbreaking to think these sweet kids didn't have something as basic as books to help with their education," said ASA President Cindy Shabes. "We love that the funds we've raised have helped kids and we look forward to doing much more as our own membership grows."

Cindy also mentioned that it was gratifying that all of this started through the act of sailing - a lifestyle she loves so much.

"It's kind of amazing that all of this positive change started with a cruising couple simply sailing into a neighborhood and deciding to help."

To donate visit asa.com/handsacrossthesea

Isler Calls Out Spithill, Jobson and Haeger

Two time America's Cup winner Peter Isler and match-racing champion Scott Dickson went head to head recently - jibing, tacking, broad-reaching at top speeds and doing everything they could to achieve record times and win something more important than any pickle dish... bragging rights.

However, Isler and Dickson weren't on some famous racecourse, commanding a high-level crew — they were staring into their iPads on ASA founder Lenny Shabes' couch playing ASA's Sailing Challenge mobile game and taking it no less seriously! The Sailing Challenge has risen to the largest selling sailing game in existence and something ASA is proud of both as an educational tool and as a great way to have fun alone or with friends.

Isler has shaved his time around the virtual circuit to an amazing 1 minute and 38-seconds which is truly unbelievable. The AC vet is now feeling his oats and is calling out a few fellow pros - laying down the gauntlet.

"I am issuing a challenge!" Isler said in all seriousness. "Gary Jobson, Annie Haeger, Jimmy Spithill — if you can hear me. ASA has agreed to donate $1,000 to your favorite charity if you can beat my time on the Sailing Challenge harbor tour course. Bring it!"

It's true. If any of these aforementioned top sailors can score under 1:38, ASA will send $1,000 to their charity of choice. Send the winning screen shot to info@asa.com and make them write that check!

This all coincides with a new update that features a much anticipated social media feature for sharing, a new sail trim game, and quite a few other updates. The sharing feature allows users to brag directly to their social media readerships. Go to the app store to download ASA's Sailing Challenge or asa.com/sailingchallenge.

ASA.COM

5 Quick Tips For Docking Under Power

Here are 5 quick tips for beginners who are about to step up to a bigger keel boat and are a teensy bit nervous about pulling big mama in and out of the slip.

These tips are taken from the four-part ASA video series written and narrated by world-renowned sailor Peter Isler.

The "Docking Made Easy" videos can be viewed for free at ASA.com.

1. Always operate at a slow walking speed when approaching a dock.
2. Practice basic maneuvers in open water before attempting docking in a real situation.
3. Assess the wind and current and how they might affect the docking process.
4. Make a game plan first and explain that plan to crew so everyone is on the same page.
5. A dock aligned with the wind allows for the recommended "upwind approach."