

MHASC 75th Birthday Celebration

Welcome Visitors, Members and Friends to the 'MIDDLE HARBOUR AMATEUR SAILING CLUB'.

A particular welcome to some of our 34 past Commodores;

- Andrew Kirk 81-82
- Frank Walsh 82-83; 2012-15 & Life Member & current member
- Michael Stovin-Bradford 84-86
- David Flakelar 2003-06
- Rob Lowndes 2006-09 & current member
- Nick Collis-George 2015-16
- Chris Kelleway 2017-21 & current member

And to guest Terry Baker – Terry's late father Brian Baker along with sailing buddy Barry Wilson were instrumental in the foundation of the Middle Harbour VJ Sailing Club 75 years ago on the 22 March 1949!

And thanks to Nick Collis-George who spent hours going through the Club's archives; obtained information from Brian and Terry Baker; and documented the early years.

A special welcome also to former members Tim Alexander, Jan Scholten and Andrew Verdon (both Club Champions in the '90s), and Sam Dockrill (with daughter Boadicea).

There are a few apologies to mention;

- Greg Marshall (Commodore 80-81) and Penny Marshall (Life Member) are unable to be here due to Penny's illness – they pass on their regards.
- Warwick Phillips – Commodore 86-87 and Life Member said he is very disappointed he can't be here and asked to pass on his best wishes.

Others sending their best regards include;

- Michael Blackburn who left for Europe this morning.
- Kath Herrmann who is away.
- Phil Lucas who has work commitments
- Brothers Rod and Brian Zemanek members from the VJ era in the 1950's and sons of F.W. 'Freddie' Zemanek, Club President 1957-1960.

Meetings and planning for setting up a sailing club started in 1948, the dreams of young people like Brian Baker and Barry Wilson came true 75 years ago this week!

The first season in 1949/1950 ended with 149 members.

This included Flag Officers, Officials and impressive list of 44 'Vice Presidents' who were 'Patrons' of the Club (including a number of politicians, knights, and wealthy businesspeople).

32 of the 44 boats registered were able to be housed at the Adams Boatshed, a local institution back then near here

– where it's noted 'they even had a dressing room for the ladies'.

By the end of the 1950's the Club – now the Middle Harbour Sailing Club was one of the strongest clubs in Australia with over 200 members, 70 boats, with a growing reputation for producing VJ and 'Skiff' champions.

The youngsters inevitably 'graduated' as you did those days to NS14s, Javelins, and other boats.

Some ended up sailing 16' & 18' skiffs – Bobby Holmes, Trevor Beardsmore, Peter Sorensen, the Zemaneks to name a few – they are still active 'old buffers.'

The short film 'Two Boys and a Boat' filmed in 1958 in Middle Harbour captures the essence of these times.

Around this time things were changing at Adams Boatshed.

The Club Committee started a dialogue with the Lands Department, NSW Maritime Board and the Mosman Council for permission to build a club house on the remains of the old 'Hoppers Wharf' – the site we still occupy today.

With Freddie Zemanek at the helm members re-purposed and extended the old wharf and completed building the clubhouse in this spot by 1961 with their own hands.

No doubt there was a great opening day celebration here 63 years ago.

Success continued...however by the early 1970's the membership had started to wane a little.

Then a 'step change' occurred when the 'Laser' dinghy was introduced to Sydney and MHASC in the mid 70's heralding the start of a 2nd era for the Club.

Things accelerated in the 1980's as the likes of Glenn Bourke started sailing Lasers and progressed to winning World Championships.

The 90's continued the excitement with MHASC's Michael Blackburn becoming the first Australian to sail a Laser at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 and then win a Bronze at the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

In the last two decades members have been active in State, National and International Laser events (including members like Diane Sissingh and Michelle Le Fevre).

This has continued the Club's strong presence and reputation – and the icing on the cake has been people like Rob Lowndes, Vanessa Dudley and Jeff Loosemore winning World Masters Championships.

In 2013 our talented sailor and editor of Australian Sailing, Vanessa Dudley, captured the 'step change' in dinghy sailing with Masters in an article for the magazine titled "The Long Run".

In a nutshell

- Older people were still sailing Lasers alongside younger people!
- The Laser was becoming the 'boat for life'!

The article mentions Frank, Rob, David Flakelar, the late Colin Cain, Geoff Lucas, Martin Brady, and father/son combination Lew and Andrew Verdon. Frank, David Quarford and Michael Stovin-Bradford are fine examples – having each bought their first Laser in 1974.

As Lew said about Laser sailing in the article; "It creates a reason to keep fit; it probably adds to your longevity retaining a reasonable level of fitness and agility".

"For me the most appealing aspect is the one-design nature of the boat. You race against people and the result is purely down to skill.

Vanessa was honored for her sailing and journalism by Australian Sailing in 2014 by naming her [Female Sailor of the Year](#).

By now MHASC was now well and truly 'The Laser Club' – and still is for almost two-thirds of the Club's wonderful history.

For all of this to happen at MHASC the foundations laid by the MHVJSC were essential along with the continued volunteer effort;

For this we are forever grateful to the Committee members and volunteers who have pitched in year after year - including the many

building and repair jobs over the past 75 years! They go above and beyond for our members.

We also acknowledge the strength of the Laser (ILCA) Association locally and worldwide as another key ingredient.

Again particularly the important contribution made by MHASC members – Rob Lowndes, Geoff Lucas, Jeff Loosemore, David Edmiston, Kath Herrmann, the late Colin Cain, and Hugh Leicester on the ILCA World Committee– thanks for your work.

Next spring will herald the 75th sailing season for MHASC.

A couple of final thank you's;

Rob Lowndes has added a lot of information to the website on results and to Club records of photos from 'the Laser era' – we need a volunteer to pull together the history of this era.

Also thanks Rob and Frank for help with tracking down past Commodores and members.

I also thank:

Diane Sissingh for running around arranging the catering today, and Matt Kuhn for putting some great photos on the Club wall and cleaning up the pennants.

Thanks again to Lyn Savage for this amazing cake!

Let's give them all a round of applause.

Finally thank you to everyone for being here others who helped today.

I now ask Frank Walsh to help us mark the 75th birthday occasion by cutting this amazing birthday cake and proposing a toast to MHASC...

LONG MAY IT CONTINUE!

Commodore Graham Jennings, 24 March 2024

Click for more information on the club's website:

[Early history](#) including more links

[Photo Gallery of 75th celebration](#)

[Photo Gallery including construction photos](#)

[Home page Post](#)