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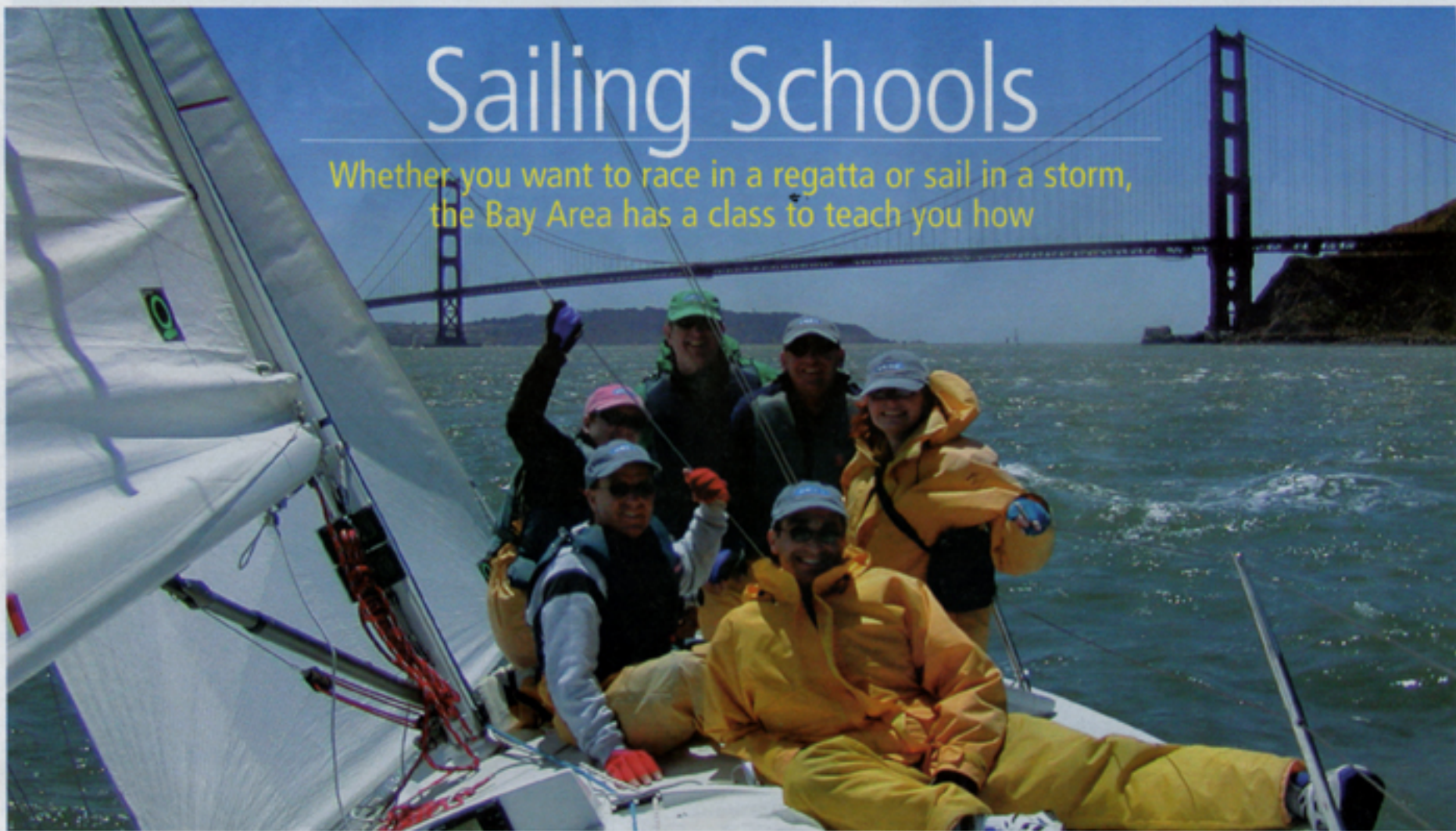
PHOTO: GARY JARCZENSKI / OCSA SAILING

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Your guide to sailing the Bay and beyond

Sailing Schools

Whether you want to race in a regatta or sail in a storm, the Bay Area has a class to teach you how



OCSC members enjoy a shared sailboat charter on San Francisco Bay.

GREG TARCZYNSKI / OCSC SAILING

By Richard Berman

"If you can sail on San Francisco Bay, you can sail anywhere," says Anthony Sandberg, founder and president of Berkeley-based OCSC Sailing. "We have such variable weather and strong currents, so it really is the most exciting sailing in the United States."

He should know. A native of Hawaii, Sandberg has spent most of

Although boating has a reputation for being a costly hobby, learning to sail is surprisingly affordable.

his adult life on boats on every continent, and in 1979 he founded OCSC (originally known as the Olympic Circle Sailing Club), which today is one of the largest sailing schools in the Bay Area. The school's main focus is teaching adults how to sail using a combination of classroom training, films and onboard experience. Unlike cars or airplanes, which require training and licensing to operate, boats are largely exempt from regulatory oversight. Nevertheless, some basic classes in safety and watercraft operation are probably worth taking.

Although boating has a reputation for being a costly hobby, learning to sail is surprisingly affordable. A four-day intensive "basic keelboat" class offered by Modern Sailing Academy in Sausalito costs

\$595 and is geared toward novice sailors. For \$445, OCSC offers a "crew class" designed to train participants to serve as members of a boat crew, and San Francisco's J World has several classes in sailing and boat racing for less than \$500.

Of course, once someone has

caught the sailing bug, there are an almost limitless number of classes available. If something happens on the water, there's probably a licensed teacher available to show boating enthusiasts how to do it. Want to learn to sail in a two-hulled boat? No problem — just about every

sailing school in town offers some sort of catamaran instruction. If you're more interested in learning how to sail at night or use navigation instruments, there are plenty of classes that will meet your needs.

One of the things that makes sailing on the bay so tricky is the



GREG TARCZYNSKI / OCSC SAILING

Hoisting the mainsail.



GREG TARCZYNSKI / OCSC SAILING

Getting ready to cast off on OCSC's monthly tour of the bay. Up to 20 boats take part each month.



GREG TRACZYNSKI/OCSC SAILING

OCSC's racing team on San Francisco Bay.

unpredictability of winds and currents. Every Bay Area resident knows that temperatures on land can fluctuate dramatically during the course of the day, thanks to fog, wind and other weather conditions. On the water, where there's no protection from the elements, these conditions are magnified. Sandberg says that in most places in the country people learn to sail in winds under 10 miles

per hour. "Here, gusts of 30 are pretty common," he says. "Not only does that create a lot of speed, but the water can get really choppy." Mix in the year-round cold temperature, and it's no wonder that no one ever managed to successfully escape from Alcatraz.

Not all boating in the Bay Area is so extreme, however. Less than a mile from the harsh conditions of the

bay is the tranquility of Lake Merritt. Situated just east of downtown Oakland, the lake was named the country's first National Wildlife Refuge in the 1860s, and today features an impressive collection of wild birds. It's also home to a city-run boating school that offers classes in kayaking, dragon boats, whale boats and sailing. The shallowness of Lake Merritt — between 8 and 10 feet — necessitates the use of smaller craft that are ideal for novice sailors.

Dana Riley, who works for the Oakland Department of Parks and Recreation, says that one of the main focuses of the boating programs is to get local children and teens to be more physically active. "We have youth camps all summer, and during the school year we offer sailing classes for junior-high students," she says. "We also teach some classes on the estuary, which connects Lake Merritt to the bay." All the programs are offered through the Lake Merritt Boating Center.

The Estuary programs, which are also run by the City of Oakland, feature larger boats in deeper water. Students over the age of 18 can get certified to operate a 20-to-25 foot

keelboat in a class that covers everything from nautical terminology to rigging to docking. The city also offers a number of other basic and advanced courses in coastal sailing, racing and navigation. For an annual fee of only \$425, graduates of the coastal navigation program can join the Classic Boating Club, which gives them access to several sailboats

based at the Jack London Aquatic Center, near Laney College.

"Sailing doesn't have to be expensive," Riley says. "It's a great hobby, and there are so many affordable ways for people to take classes and get involved. All they need to do is come down to Lake Merritt on the weekends to see what kinds of opportunities there are."



GARY TRACZYNSKI/OCSC SAILING

As anyone on a boat will affirm: Sailors make the best friends.