

The Center for
WOODEN BOATS

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Fundraising for Community Programs in Traditional Maritime Skills

by Dick Wagner

First comes the vision. Those of us who have done real time in experiential education know the drill: Kids who feel alienated and destined to fail in traditional educational environments can accomplish positive things in hands-on learning programs. And their rate of success is highest when they are building and sailing a small boat. Mental health professionals tell us so, and so do my own empirical observations. It has to do mainly with the elation resulting from activity simultaneously employing the hand and the mind, and the result is a lifelong bonding to the program, the site, and the instructors.

Perhaps your community is facing a crisis with youth dropping out of school, family, and mainstream society. You know a program that involves wooden boat building and sailing will provide the job skills, life skills, and self-esteem these kids never had before. All you need is help to get this great community-benefiting project going.

Successful fundraising for charitable causes involves far more than just raising the dough. A single grant that provides enough money to implement the vision would be wonderful, but it's unlikely. Raising the means for the project includes raising money, volunteer time, and materials. Every hour. Every day.

The good news is that the capacity for freely giving money, time, and materials for causes that speak to the

heart is a universal human quality. The bad news is there are too many good ideas for the charitable donors of the world to support—too many requests to save the kids, the hungry, the homeless, the sick, and the environment.

Nonprofit Status

The start of all searches for help is your vision and mission in printed form. This is your inspiration and guidebook. The nonprofit status of your organization is also a key requirement. Many people do not know that most individual and corporate donors and all foundation and government donors can contribute only to nonprofit organizations. Besides that, being an IRS-recognized nonprofit means your organization doesn't pay any income tax.

Filling out the applications for nonprofit status is a good mental workout. The IRS questionnaire is typically Byzantine, but it can be eventually mastered by most 10th-grade students. The benefit to the public of your proposal has to be stated in a clear and convincing way. Do not hire a lawyer for this job.

An IRS-recognized nonprofit organization first must be a nonprofit corporation. Contact your Secretary of State's office to submit your Articles of Incorporation. (The incorporation status must be renewed yearly. If it isn't, your IRS status will not be valid.) Then you apply to the IRS for 501(c)(3) status. After a delay of 6 to 18 months (no kidding!), the IRS tells 95% of the applicants they are not eligible. It's a test of endurance. Rewrite and resubmit; you will likely make it the second time.

Grants, Membership, and Earnings

Believe in success, but don't expect it will happen with a bases-loaded home run. The big foundation and government grants you hear about still only amount to about 3% of the funding for nonprofits. Also, in general, foundations often prefer funding for capital

projects, such as a building. They tend to be keen about physical structures that last a long time. In reality, there is no foundation at this time that is looking for small craft building and sailing projects.

When applying for a contribution, put yourself in the potential donor's shoes. Donors can only support those projects that they believe will give the maximum public benefit for the least bucks. State your case with passion, in one or two pages, and grab their attention in the fourth paragraph with a vivid example of one kid's epiphany through your work.

After the vision, the next step is to develop grassroots support for the project through membership, earnings, cash donations, in-kind donations, and volunteer help. If you can't gather a wide base of public support, then maybe your idea isn't as good as you thought. Conversely, when you begin to establish a cheering section, it grows exponentially. Everyone wants to join a winning team. But first ask your friends and neighbors for help. They have already listened to and approved your ideas.

Members are the plasma of nonprofits. A mass of members is a political, social, and economic power base. The members also volunteer their time and expertise. At the Center for Wooden Boats (CWB) many volunteers have taken on serious long-term responsibilities, including managing the Boatshop, the Boat Livery, and the sailing instruction program. Those with professional skills have provided legal consultation, bookkeeping, marine surveying, publishing, architectural design, graphic design, and marketing consultation.

It's more natural for the members of your organization to contribute their cash, time, site, tools, materials and letters of support if you have first accomplished a pilot project. Get together the cast of characters you expect to be involved with the project: the students, the hard-skills instructors, the soft-skills counselors, and, if possible, a tweed-jacketed, pipe-smoking psychiatrist. Then go build a boat and sail it. Since you are trying to make others believe that learning by doing is worthwhile, you should first do it yourself.

Although I mentioned that no foundations have yet been created specifically to fund small-craft programs, there is now a blip on the radar screen. It is the John Gardner Endowment, a proposal for a fund dedicated to encouraging projects involving wooden small craft. John Gardner rescued classic small boats from the black hole of oblivion. The endowment is a way of perpetuating John Gardner's legacy. It will get underway if at least \$100,000 is pledged. (For information on making a pledge, contact Ben Fuller, HCR 68 Box 1966, Cushing, ME 04563.)

CWB gains half its income through project earnings.

You can market programs for desk-bound bureaucrats on building and sailing boats, write and sell monographs on traditional boats, rent out your facility for events, meetings, and parties, publish posters and skills/resource directories, sell notecards, T-shirts, mugs, decals, duffels, and other logo merchandise. Use your collective skills and imagination.

Partnerships

Never say never. If your project is good and you have been turned down for contributions, keep trying. CWB had an idea to use our resources to clean up our publicly owned neighborhood, Lake Union, right in the middle of Seattle. We called the project "Brightwater." Our proposal was to restore one of our classic powerboats, purchase equipment, assemble volunteers, and go forth as the janitors of Lake Union. We applied to a private foundation whose sole mission was environmental health. They liked our project but turned us down because they would rather put their money into educational programs on why floating debris is bad than into the gear to remove it. We next approached a state agency whose goal also was to preserve our environment. They found our plan exciting but couldn't fund it. Although their mission was the same as ours, their funding plan was to pay for rental equipment and the staff to use it. At last, we found the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods. We rewrote the grant application as a partnership with a neighborhood association, and the project was funded.

Brightwater would still be a dream without our partnership with The Floating Homes Association. They had no money, but they did have a deep commitment to preserving the water quality of Lake Union and, as Lake Union residents, they gave credibility to our proposal.

Partnership is power. There are more organizations than you can imagine that may want to be or should be part of your dream. They include public and private schools, social-service agencies, government human resources departments, government parks and recreation departments, labor unions, historic museums, and local businesses which offer entry-level jobs. All of these organizations are interested in either kids, education, providing job skills, or providing self-esteem. They can donate money, skilled mentors and counselors, space, tools, or grant writers. And their endorsement can give your project the seal of approval that convinces potential funders it will succeed.

Partnerships are foundation blocks for the programs that demonstrate to prospective donors that you can put their money to work effectively.

The Center received a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, as well as individuals, two

other foundations, and WoodenBoat, to conduct a planning conference, "Heritage Maritime Skills and Foundering Youth." We invited traditional small-craft professionals, public school administrators, education and human resource professionals. The purpose was for the participants to brainstorm about how maritime organizations could use their energy, knowledge, and skills—their available resources—to serve disadvantaged and at-risk youth. As a direct result of the conference, CWB proposed and received grants for programs under the umbrella title All Aboard with North Seattle Learning Center, a public school for emotionally disturbed teenagers; Orion School, a public school for homeless teenagers; and an eight-week Summer Youth Employment program. [see p. 45 for a brief profile of this program]

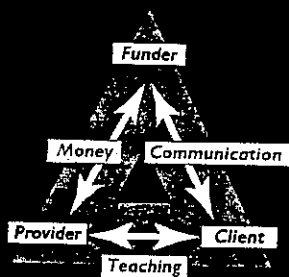
Those programs, whose seed was a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, have continued at CWB and are now in their fifth year. Also, through the information and support of the Conference, the Alexandria Seaport Foundation in Virginia, and Homeport Learning Center in Bellingham, Washington, both began successful programs for at-risk youth.

Through these programs, our "waterlord" (the City of Seattle) came to recognize our community-benefiting services and decided, as an unsolicited gift, to eliminate the \$10,000-a-year rental charge for our site. Make your local government aware of how it can help your program simply by providing low-cost or cost-free space. Use CWB as an example. In-kind donations for haulout and repair of boats used in youth programs have been given by boatyards, marine equipment companies, lumber companies, and marine surveyors.

Partnerships will open new avenues to money; they also will provide opportunities for equally valuable in-kind donations. For example, the University of Washington School of Social Work has donated to us a pre- and post-class test that they developed specifically for All Aboard. This test provides the type of evaluation in job skills, life skills, and maritime skills that we need in order to have measurable proof of the program's value. Evaluations are an essential element in fundraising projects such as boatbuilding for disadvantaged youth. When presented with a cutting-edge proposal, potential donors need close-to-scientific evidence that they have bought a proven program.

The Department of Juvenile Rehabilitation provided a classroom that we needed for the academic work required in our All Aboard program. But the Department was almost a mile away from us, providing a bit of a logistics chore. We wanted a closer classroom. Our next-door neighbor, the Naval Reserve Base, had the space. We asked, and they said "Sure." As the Commanding Officer reasoned, many of the sailors at the base are as "at-risk" as the teenagers we are teaching, so why not participate in the program?

Another successful collaboration was with Alternative School #1 (a K-through-8 Seattle public school), The Floating Homes Association, and Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods. CWB and the school dreamed up a boatbuilding-sailing instruction program for the seventh and eighth graders. Floating Homes, the water-bound community group, sponsored a grant application to the Department of Neighborhoods for boat materials. CWB personnel taught parents and school staff how to build the first boat. Then the school set up one of its unused



The Golden Triangle

Jim Hsiang, of East Palo Alto, California, works with disadvantaged young people building boats and furniture. His "Golden Triangle" emphasizes the need for an integrated relationship between service providers, funders, and clients.

The triangle applies to any community boatbuilding program. In

return for grants and private donations, providers, or teachers, should invite funders for shop visits, send them periodic status reports on the boats, and ask them to participate in events such as launchings. The link between these providers and clients (the youth involved) is forged not only by the teaching that goes on with each project, but also by feed-

back from the kids, which helps refine the program. In turn, the kids establish a solid connection with funders through letter writing, conversations during site visits, and public relations showing program success.

The sustainability of any community program depends on strong linkage between all three corners of the triangle.

classrooms as a shop, where the students built five more of the 9½' Clancy skiffs. During the spring break, sailing instruction is given to the students at CWB, where the boats are kept. The kids even created their own yacht club—the only one run by public school students, I believe.

The Alternative School is a case study in the values of experiential education. Up to 10 years ago, it was a dead-end holding pen for kids deemed unlikely to complete public school. Since then, with a new principal and staff committed to direct-experience education, academic achievements and positive social behavior have soared. There is now a waiting list to enroll. CWB's relationship with the school began when their principal brought us a group of his students for a weekend to experience CWB's historic boats. The kids' enthusiasm and learning curve impressed us. The next challenge was to build boats. And so it came to be.

To begin a similar program, I suggest you test the waters with your local schools by offering a free workshop in sailing or boatbuilding to the principals in your community. Once they get turned on, the rest is fair winds.

As one funding source fades away, others can pop up to replace it. An element of All Aboard provides sailing instruction for homeless teenagers. This initially was funded by the Cultural Resources Department of our county. Since the Department is flooded with requests, after the first two years of county funding we were on our own. All Aboard for homeless teenagers is still going; the costs have been met by contributions from private foundations, individuals, and local corporations and businesses. Wide recognition of All Aboard has come from our own newsletter; coverage in other newsletters, magazines, newspapers, and television; and awards from our State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Partners in Public Education, the Center for Career Alternatives, and the U.S. Sailing Association. As a result, private and corporate contributions have provided funds for its continuation. In 1997, a single plea to our neighborhood businesses for funds for at-risk youth programs resulted in \$8,240 in contributions from seven companies.

My fundraising philosophy is simply, "Cast thy bread upon the waters." Provide for your community, and they will provide for you. The more you involve the broadest scope of your community, the more "atta boy!" checks you will get without any formal request from you. Recently we received unsolicited grants for programs for disadvantaged youth from a local naval architecture and engineering firm, a yacht brokers' association, three foundations, a neighborhood baby-sitting co-op, and the son-in-law of a deceased CWB member.

Partnerships are fun and mentally stimulating. Each

partner has its own mission. They may include a museum, social agency, public school, hamburger franchise, yacht broker, junkyard, or local government. Think of the exciting roundtable sessions talking about the program's possibilities. The collective skills and collective goals can and will lead the program's participants to new plateaus of learning experiences, social development, and jobs. Can your project become part of the curriculum of the local middle school or high school? Can the project have teams of high-risk and high-achiever kids? Will this lead to bonding and positive values gained? Can you add maritime art, literature, and music to the existing aspects of history, math, and science in the project? What about multicultural issues? Do your students know of the boats of others? Can travel abroad be included in the program?

Cooperatively we can create programs that have much deeper values than building a boat or passing a sailing test. We can assist youth in learning new skills and provide the means for them to successfully solve complex problems, work as teammates, participate as leaders, discover potentials they never dreamed of.

Your project can be the catalyst for the intellectual and social growth of everyone involved: the kids and the partners. Museums can and should be more community-service oriented. Schools can and should provide the enrichment of experiential education opportunities. Social workers and the courts can and should know that the learning environment is a critical factor for positive learning experiences.

Measuring Success

The last word is evaluation. We all want to know how we are doing. Donors demand and deserve to know their contributions have provided something that has changed lives in a positive way. Look, listen, and document the accomplishments of the participants. Some will pass academic challenges for the first time, some will learn to work cooperatively and with good humor. Many will gain impressive skills in woodworking, marlinspike work, and sailing. Most will show marked improvements in vocabulary, verbal and written communication. Their behaviors will be better than in any other environment they have been in. Disputes will be solved by reasoning. Complex problems will be worked on cooperatively.

Evidence of successful programs can be obtained from the students. They can keep a daily journal recording the maritime skills and the life skills they achieved. At the program's conclusion, ask the students to write a letter to your organization about what the program meant to them. Request letters of endorsement from the social-services agencies and schools that recruited your students. The journal entries and letters will provide

credibility to your grant applications.

These are the measurable evaluations you will treasure and the donors will understand and be proud to support. As the kids succeed, so will we all.

For the recent launching of a replica of a 26' Aleut umiak (or "canoe"), one of the products of our summer-long All Aboard program for high-risk kids, two 15-year-olds wrote this piece:

Boat Blessing

We bless this day, we bless this boat, whose spirit will forever live strong in our hearts.

We thank all the Gods for blessing us with wood and cloth to build this beautiful Umiak.

The energy, the sweat, the blood and tears will always be remembered.

As we continue our voyage of life we will still work as a team. The currents of life are rough, but we will overcome all of them, keeping ourselves afloat.

We stand tall, and we float high as we work hard on our long future ride. We'll know that our spirits will forever be aboard the Umiak.

—written by Allahtash and Heidi

Allahtash and Heidi and their All Aboard classmates are the reasons we exist. These kids came to us aloof, mistrustful, and disillusioned. They believed they were destined to fail. They left us with skills that will be lifetime assets and a spirit of accomplishment they will never forget.

Dick Wagner began seriously playing with boats 30 years ago with the establishment of The Old Boathouse, a traditional wooden boat livery, located in Seattle. Not unlike a swarm of locusts, people came, hungering for small boat information. Out of this evolved The Center for Wooden Boats, a do-touch maritime museum dedicated to serving the broadest spectrum of its community. Dick is now Founding Director of CWB, working on education programs, site planning, and raising the means to implement them.

Hey, Why Bother to Be a CWB Member?

BY DAVID DOLSON

Here is the question: Insofar as the Center for Wooden Boats is free and open to all, why bother to be a member?

Well, members pay less to take out live-ry boats. Nice, but that doesn't motivate me. The same with member discounts on merchandise. Nice, but not compelling. Several merchants, generous sponsors such as Fisheries, give substantial discounts to CWB members. Now that can prove substantial! Last time I did significant work on my boat, I saved a few hundred dollars on materials because I was a CWB member. That impressed me.

So much for material benefits of membership. The thing is, CWB is a soulful, passionate place where the rewards are to your spirit, your heart, your soul, your mind – all the really important places you live. In this realm, the rewards are so great they defy enumeration. Linger on the docks awhile and you see parents glowing protectively over their children as they explore life up close and personal – riding in boats, enthralled by ducks and geese and seaplanes, learning to use a hammer and drill to make a toy boat. When I work at the center with children, I always tell them they cannot leave until they have had fun. None has ever succeeded in staying, though many try – offering slyly to live at CWB until they have fun.

Linger on the docks and you will see photographers and painters, quietly reveling in the visual wealth. Linger and you will see workers taking their lunch break in this peaceful haven right in the middle of the city – a little sustenance for the body, a lot for the soul.

Watch the boat wrights. Watch them caress the wood and notice the peace in their faces. Work it is, but of a therapeutic kind. Little anger or frustration here. Mostly satisfaction.

Watch students preparing for a sailing lesson – rigging the sails, discussing how they will sail away from the dock without an engine. Imagine! They venture out on the lake depending on sails and wind to glide away, tour the lake and return to the dock! As a sailing instructor, I can only ask you to believe me when I tell you that I have seen worldly successful adults exult in pure joy and pride – the variety seldom known since childhood – when they have successfully brought a boat to dock under sail and been acknowledged for their skill. In a world where they play highly segmented

and appointed roles, they come to CWB to learn to be master and commander of a boat and, perhaps, their lives.

CWB has a small, dedicated, underpaid staff and hundreds of volunteers who create this magical world. It has to be the friendliest place in Seattle. Every one is welcome. To make sure this is understood, we reach out – to the schools, to street kids, to the terminally ill, to tourists, to social and business organizations, to other boating and maritime groups, to the general public. We offer them boat rides, instruction in the maritime arts and crafts, a bustling summer festival, a world-class collection of historic boats and artifacts. We are a hands-on museum, a maritime school, a haven and hangout, a deep breath of authenticity, a maritime cultural center, and the recreational nexus for the emerging new South Lake Union neighborhood. We provide a venue for boaters, craftsmen, artists, conversationalists, peace-seekers, spectators, families in pursuit of fun and togetherness, pot-luckers, weddings and parties and meetings, musicians and storytellers, dreamers, historians and thirsting souls. We are the quintessential Seattle grass-roots organization. We are a dream come true – dream after dream, day after day. We are open 363 days a year – and sometime more. We are studied and emulated by maritime organizations worldwide. Really!

So here is why to be a member. Despite all the work done by volunteers, it inevitably costs money to keep this haven going. We are able to leverage your membership dollars and donations when we seek support from foundations and businesses. The first thing they look for is how our community supports us. The more members, the more contributions from members, the more money foundations and businesses are willing to contribute. If ever there were a case of success breeding success, this is it. And, trust me, we work hard at obtaining support from foundations and our business friends.

If you want to feed your spirit, come linger on our docks. Better yet become a member and support this haven. Even better become a volunteer. You will not believe the reward you will experience. And you don't have to know a thing about boats or wood. We have volunteers who help plan parties and events, who help with marketing and mailings, with gardening, with greeting visitors at the front desk, with graphic design and writing, with fund-raising, with computing, with construction.

We are not a club. Not a yacht club, not a country club, not a social club. We are a community center, a Seattle cultural center, a haven from the impersonal aspects of modern life.

If you like what you see and hear and sense, support CWB by becoming a member. Even if you live in Texas or Kansas, become a member. You will not be alone. We have members across the country and across the world.

Before you go, let me tell a story that sends my spirit soaring. Two summers ago, I taught a weeklong sailing class for teens. Early on I asked each of the eight young folks why they joined the class. One young lady, her eyes cast permanently on her shoelaces, said her aunt had made her come. The girl, Marie, was from New York City and spending the summer here with her aunt. Marie said girls don't sail. So I introduced her to our Youth Director, Nancy, and told her Nancy was a Coast Guard licensed schooner captain. When I explained what a schooner is, Marie looked up at Nancy with open interest. Then I introduced Marie to our Sailing Director, Mindy, and explained that Mindy was in charge of all sailing instructors and sailing programs. Marie inspected Mindy. Neither Mindy nor Nancy was very different from Marie and both quite young. Marie started participating more in class and actually showed considerable talent for nautical matters. She learned knots quickly, so I asked her to help another student who was struggling. At the end of the week, Marie was our most accomplished sailor. She won all the sailing races the last day of class. She no longer looked at her shoelaces. Her head was high, her eyes, bright. When she received her captain's hat, all the other students cheered. She was, by the way, the only girl in the class. I think that week changed her life for the better. She knew now how to sail a boat, she had become a leader, and she had gone from being shy around the boys to being their equal or more. It may have been the best week of her young life. She went home a different person – or at least an empowered person. I will never forget her. I will never forget the absolute, deep pleasure I felt in being an instrument for good in her life. If she never again sails, she will nonetheless be the captain of her life.

Such are the thrills you can find at CWB. How can you possibly not want to be a supporting member!? I no longer am allowed to offer plenary indulgences (tickets to heaven) for joining. But if you join, look me up and I will introduce you around and take you for a sail. Welcome aboard. 🚤

Navigator's Report
April 2003

Connecting with Youth

History is what has happened. It is inexorably entwined in our lives. Precedent is the basis of law, the stock market and weather predictions. Baseball is statistical history, embellished with a bat and ball. Newspapers, radio and TV give us news of yesterday.

Traditionally, history has been wrenched from its normal role in everyday life when youth enters third or fourth grade. At school eight year olds are introduced to history as an academic abstraction: geography and social studies become names and dates. The past is put in a complex, slippery and immeasurable scale of time, place and cultures. When was the Big Bang, age of dinosaurs, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age? What is the significance of the Code of Hammurabi, the printing press, the cotton gin, the iron chink, Rembrandt, and Picasso? At eight, history transforms from an element of life to a database that seems to have little relevance to life.

Our historic museums have become places where history is preserved in a static manner, not unlike mausoleums. Historic museums have been designed for middle-aged people who are pre-programmed to support their community's cultural resources. Youth visit these museums through the school field-trip phenomenon. Millions of adults and youth pass through historic museums and the turnstile count of visitors is assumed to measure its success as an educational facility.

Counting heads doesn't do the job. Unfortunately, most museums have not risen to the moral obligation of making history a vital part of their community: the passions, adventures, travails and triumphs that are the essence of history. Historical museums are needed to be counterpoint to our grade school experience. And for those few lucky ones who did have enlightened history in school, the museums should expand and enhance those believers.

When our first child was born in 1967, my wife and I began the Old Boathouse, renting traditional boats behind our houseboat. People came to use the boats and called the place "a living museum." Our kids grew up at the Old Boathouse and learned about the historic boats they played with – the "living museum" exhibits.

Through that experience it became clear that the best way to preserve heritage is to start with youth.

Historic museums have the resources to give experiences that will make lifetime supporters. And through projects of youth, the museums can gain credibility as part of the community fabric and add to the museum's information bank.

Historic museums have underplayed their social benefiting services. They are sanctuaries, free of sirens, gunshots and crashing cars. They give pride of place, pride of their cultures, inspirational examples of great accomplishments in craftsmanship, technology, courage, endurance and leadership by the disadvantaged and downtrodden of our communities.

The direct experience heritage learning opportunities for youth are infinite. Pioneer museums, for example, can offer planting and nurturing the orchards and flower beds that pioneers favored; carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving wool; using a hand press to make cider; and using a hand crank to make ice cream.

Youth can map historic districts, measure and draft historic structures; interview elders; design and construct kiosks marking historic places; write their interpretation; act out historic moments, writing the script and making the costumes.

All cultural organizations can partner with schools. The artifacts, equipment, specialists and environments of history, science and art museums, symphonies, operas and ballets, should be partnered with schools and enhance their learning goals.

Museums can partner with other cultural organizations. Science and maritime museums can work together on studies of hydrodynamics, aerodynamics, flotation, leverage and navigation.

Art and history museums can partner on the exhibits and programs of folk art and crafts, historic themes in art.

Museums can be extensions of community centers for after-school and summer programs, including hands-on and team activities that are mission related. Whatever a museum displays in a glass case, a hands-on activity can make it come alive. For example, next to a don't touch historic sextant, the museum could also have a do touch plastic sextant, with a fish bowl of water for horizon and a light bulb overhead for a star. Kids would get a direct experience in celestial navigation alongside an original relic brass sextant.

Create the right environment for kids and they will come and learn. Youth that are working with hands and mind on a project they have chosen will gain knowledge and self esteem. Self-esteem is the key to academic achievement. Through direct experience learning, epiphanies happen. Those moments of intellectual revelation are the experiences museums should provide. It is their moral obligation. And when one has that "Eureka" moment, it will forever bond them to the place it happened. The epiphany is the medal of honor that museums can and should confer.

Dick Wagner