

KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Real estate histories are always interesting. The look of a building this year belies the history that changing ownership, change of use, that storms, fires and neglect can effect. One such building is the West End Racing Club at 81 Commercial Street—W.E.R.C. Many of you may not even have noticed this modest clapboard and shingled building. Probably because all the activity takes place behind the building on the beach. For 46 years this has been the learning center for young swimmers and sailors, and the pet project of Flyer Santos. The building's history was quite different prior to 1940.

The Provincetown Wharf Theatre occupied 81 Commercial

living fun finalized when the party-makers and party-goers were far from the deck and the dance floor of the Provincetown Wharf Theatre. A horrific and humbling storm destroyed the entire complex on Valentine's Day, 1940.

When all the debris that did not wash out to sea was removed, the use of the open space naturally gravitated to outdoor marine recreation. A safe town beach for children made the obvious move to be a meeting and mooring place. Living by the bay, it's a good idea to know exactly how to act both when in and on the water. Flyer Santos is vehement on this subject. He "couldn't stand anyone who can't swim. Like

the time the trapboat had 5 men aboard and 1,000 pounds of tuna. One man went over and they used a gaff to save him. Cut him up bad, because no one could swim!" The number of children who have learned their marine skills from this patch of beach is countless.

The effort started in 1952 with rowboats on the beach and a Red Cross teacher from Dennis teaching the children boat safety and how to swim. With two or three skiffs and a swimming program, the West End Racing Club began to emerge. Larry Richmond and Frank Aresta began devising a plan for a bona fide club. Marjorie



Street before the W.E.R.C. Besides being a theatre, it was also a restaurant. Doc Eisenberger's 12-piece orchestra was showcased and the clientele came from all over the East Coast and Manhattan and even many wiley individuals from beyond.

Why not? Fun and great entertainment, good food and great views, personalities on and off the stage could be enjoyed. So the Provincetown Wharf Theatre thrived. Sally Rand, Bette Davis, Theresa Wright, Sinclair Lewis and Norman Rockwell all sweat up a good time under the same roof.

Memories are one thing; living them is the best. All th's high-

Seaver bought the first boat for W.E.R.C. Their now-famous raffles began with Fillmore Miller of B.H. Dyer Hardware donating a toaster as the first raffle prize. Fillmore won 1st prize and his own toaster. Of course, he donated the toaster a second time. The club grew, thrived and matured just like the junior participants.

By 1954 the club boasted eight boats. When the 2nd boat arrived from Palmer Scott of New Bedford, Larry Richmond said, "I'll get the sail." The eight original boats were "weasels," Gunther rigged, one sail, no jib. Hurricane Carol in 1954 splintered all the weasels along with so many other boats in the

harbor. Among the vessels in severe trouble was the yacht of St. George's School of Newport, Rhode Island. Flyer was called in to try to ease the yacht out of its jammed position. Flyer Santos had to cut into two wharfs to free the boat. St. George's School was so impressed and pleased with Flyer's work that they donated eight weasels to replace the storm-splintered weasels of the West End Racing Club. Mickey Finkle transported the boats to Provincetown free of charge. But, once again, life is not perfect. Each boat required a lot of work and ably and willingly, Flyer Santos was the man to do it. With the boats in place, a structure was then needed. Larry Richmond reentered the planning and was able to buy the land for W.E.R.C. in 1956. The present club house was then built. The dedication of the land and the building was held in August, 1956. Larry Richmond was also instrumental in originating and coordinating the childrens' water safety programs. He dedicated many hours to this project until his death in 1977. It was then that Flyer Santos was asked to take over the project.

Often minus money, a \$5.00 registration fee was initiated "so that the participants would value the opportunity." Today the fee is \$25.00. Along with the fee, each joiner was asked to sign a code of ethics. In this commitment they agreed to do their share of work to keep the club running smoothly. Some 161 children enrolled this year—locals, summer tourists, a Chilean, 2 Germans and 3 Parisians. Language is not a problem for hands-on activities and fun. The youngsters are here to learn to swim and to race sailboats. The competitions teach sportsmanship and develop social skills.

I remember Flyer was pleased one year when a child from Kuwait won. Desert child—sailing winner. He was also proud when each of his own six children won in competitions. John Francis ("Grassy") Santos won the year that MacMillan hosted his "Lecture and Colored Movies" at Town Hall September 2, 1955. The cost to adults was \$1.00 — tax-exempt. "Grassy" was so small that MacMillan had to lift him up onto the podium to receive his trophy.

The water remains the same, but the equipment has changed. Fiberglass has cut maintenance to

the quick and the Club boasts 14' and 19' kayaks, a 10' Sunfish, and even a water bicycle which the children love. Flyer proudly reminds us that "the West End Racing Club is the only free sailing program—anywhere!"

Besides thoughtful and generous donations, the club operates from the proceeds of the annual raffle which sends 100 or more small swimmers and sailors scurrying about the West End hawking tickets. You may end up with a thickness of tickets if you live in or pass through this neighborhood mid- to late August. The raffle and awards are celebrated at an annual banquet—free to guests once the tickets are sold. Playing days lead on in school days. And Flyer closes up the Club for another season, content that he has encouraged so many young people to love the lure of the sea and to feel safe and confident when contending with this great natural force.

During a chat with Flyer long ago, he recited this poem put in print for the first time. He described his love of the sea with all its force and lore, and Flyer's Boatyard—still in the family and run by John Francis "Grassy". The West End Racing Club and his beloved *Rose Dorothea* request that we now put it in print a second time.

*"Many years ago they sailed the Frances Whelan
And her dear sis[ter], Mary Dear.
Then they built the Santo and Squanto
—The poorest sailors around here—
And then they built the Dahlin' Little Jesse Costa
But the Annie Perry was the pride of the sea
But the one that won the cup in the Provincetown Race
Was the good ole Rose Dorothee."*

Flyer first heard this at age eight from yarning fishermen whiling dry days on the Provincetown wharves.

