

A labor of love

The West End Racing Club

By Karen Berman

For 23 years hundreds of children have grown up spending summers at the West End Racing Club, a "labor of love" for Lawrence Richmond.

Richmond first came to Provincetown in 1940 with his wife and friends—over his own objections. He had come to Provincetown by boat as a child, when fish were dried on the shore. "When my friend said 'Provincetown,' I smelled it," he said.

But his week-long stay extended every summer until 1945, when he bought his house at 40 Commercial Street and stayed the whole season. "I knew this was the place," he said. "It's the kind of refuge most people look for."

Until he started spending summers in Provincetown, away from his Great Neck, N.Y. year-round home, he had never done any sailing. But once Richmond was here, Manuel Furtado, who ran a boat livery in the West End, took him under his wing.

"I never knew if I was doing it right," he said. "When Manuel Furtado was happy, he still sounded unhappy." Then a hurricane nearly destroyed Furtado's livery. Richmond bought and rebuilt one of the damaged boats. "Once I got that first taste, I was taken, by the town and the harbor."

With his new appreciation for sailing and Provincetown's harbor, Richmond noticed that most of the children in town, local and summer residents, had no place to enjoy boating.

So in 1953 Richmond and Francis Santos, Joseph Andrews, Philmore Miller, Richard Santos, Francis Rogers and the late Charles Schilowitz formed the West End Racing Club.

The first year, met by enthusiasm from local families, the club used property at Flyers Boat Shop. The next year the group bought the property at its present location. It had belonged to Margaret Hewes, who had operated a theater on the wharf there.

She sold the property for \$3200, happy that it would be used for a public service.

The clubhouse presented another major project for the members. Original plans, drawn by the late sailor and architect William Hurlbert turned out to cost too much to carry out. The building that now stands is based on simpler plans drawn by Richard Santos, who taught high school and was the club's first beach counselor.



Larry Richmond

To finance the clubhouse and bulkhead, the group planned a raffle of artwork donated by local artists. "Everyone in town donated," Richmond said. "The kids went all over town selling tickets. Instead of one raffle, we ended up having four." Finally, in 1957 the clubhouse was completed, financed almost entirely by the raffles.

The only other pressing need for a sailing club with land, a harbor, a clubhouse and nearly 100 enthusiastic young sailors, was a fleet. That was acquired through another sailing school in Rhode Island, whose fleet of Weasels had been damaged by a storm.

With Richard Santos' help, the boats were rehabilitated at the high school and bought for the club. Santos taught basic sailing skills and water safety and, Richmond said, "The kids had a fantastic time."

Now, with a nine-boat fleet of Robins and Sunfish, under beach counselor Tommy Dahill, Provincetown children are still coming back. "We get about 50 to 400 kids, depending on the summer," Richmond said.

"A lot of the kids who belong now are the children of kids who grew up at the Racing Club. I get to feeling very old when I talk about this."

The West End Racing Club is entirely supported by local businesses and its founders. Presently the trustees are Richmond, Richard Santos and Joseph Andrews. Richmond said the group had contemplated getting support from a corporation, but decided against it because of the influence a sponsor might exert over the operation.

Richmond is concerned now about the continuity of the program. "I feel it's a program that should continue forever," he said. "If the Provincetown Recreation Commission would take it over, it would be a good thing for the town. After all, we're all going to die."

He said that through the years, the demand for the club has remained pretty constant. "We don't go in for any advertising," he said. "We have all we can handle with what we get by word of mouth."

And the children who spend their summers sailing at the club haven't changed much either. "The club goes through cycles," said Richmond, "but nothing really changes. One summer everyone wants to be in motorboats, then that fades and another cycle starts. But our motive stays the same."

The children who spend summers at the racing club are between eight and 16 years old. Richmond said sometimes their enthusiasm is hard to inspire. But he said many insist that their families return to Provincetown each summer so they can return to the West End Racing Club.

Richmond's own involvement in Provincetown life doesn't stop with sailing. He has been a trustee of the Provincetown Art Association for six years, and was president of the Provincetown Symphony for three years, from 1967 to 1969.

He graduated from Dartmouth in 1930, and until he retired last year, he was a music publisher and distributor. His corporations through the years have been Music Dealers Service, Inc., Windsor Music Press, Ashley Publications and Manhattan Publications, publishers of reprint classical music.

He and his wife, Helene, have one daughter, Lauren, who has lived in Provincetown since graduating from St. Lawrence University. Richmond is in the process of helping her renovate a 200-year-old house next door to his own.

After years of helping children get their first taste of racing, Richmond, 66, has given his Lightning to "the kids" to race. "It's more fun now to watch and let other people have the aggravation," he said.

Now that he is retired from music publishing, Richmond plans to spend the greater portion of the year in Provincetown. "I feel like part of the scenery here," he said, "although no one asked me to be. But we wouldn't have been here for almost 40 years if we didn't love it."



The racing club's first fleet of boats in the 1950's

Photo by John Gregory