



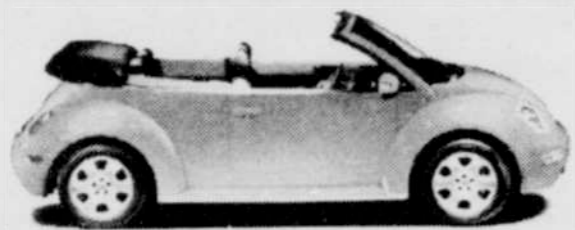
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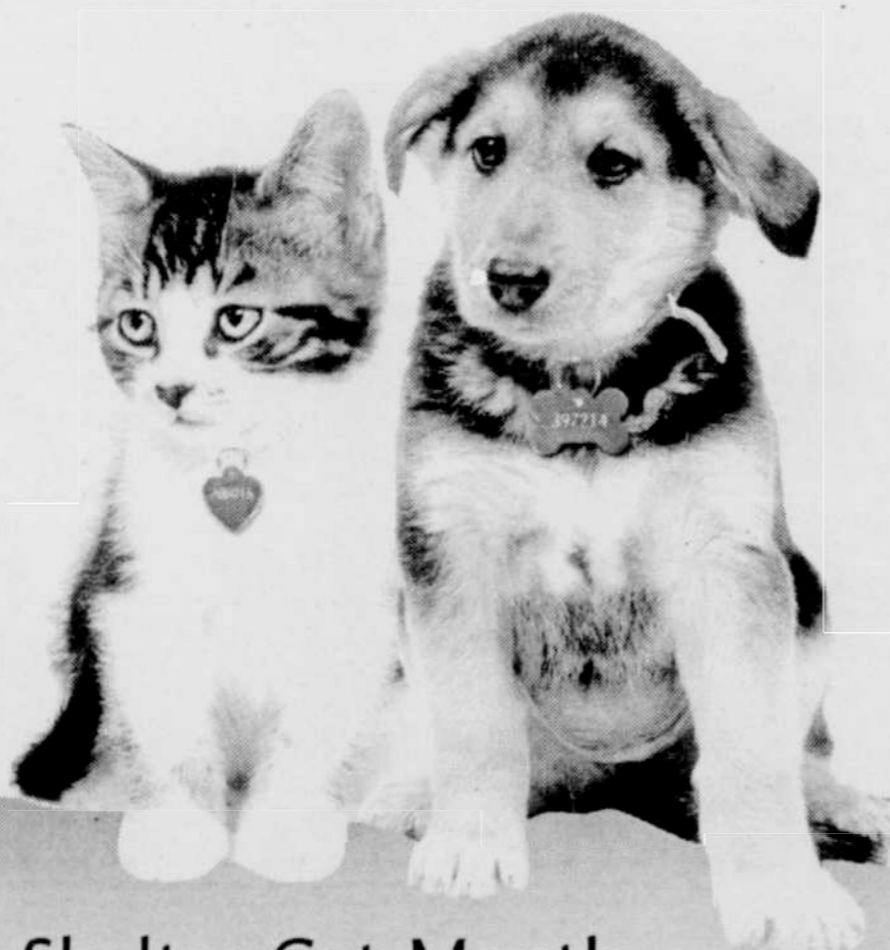
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## CULTURE

# Hey sailor

Pacific Coast Yacht Club cruises Oregon's rivers

BY KATHY BELGE



The Pacific Coast Yacht Club offers public cruises during Pride weekend. Clockwise from back left: Alison Mazon, Joel Sundstrom, Edd Scott and John McDonald-O'Leary.

Trying hard to keep the tune from Gilligan's Island out of my head, I climbed on board John McDonald-O'Leary and Joel Sundstrom's 1962, 41-foot Chris Craft yacht on a recent Saturday afternoon. It's like a floating RV, only prettier—beautiful woodwork, a large, bright sitting area (the saloon) and a brass barometer.

I don't know what a typical day on the Columbia River is like, but the afternoon I motored out with Portland's queer boating group, the first two vessels we saw were loaded down with lesbians. "It's a small river," a member comments. I guess in a town with as many lesbians as Portland, I shouldn't have been too surprised.

The Pacific Coast Yacht Club's aim is to bring together queers and queer-friendly folks who have an interest in power or sail boating. "We have a diversity of boats," says Sundstrom of the social club's 15 or so members, who will offer Pride cruises to the public June 19 and 20.

The group isn't strictly for yachters, though. Some members have smaller fishing boats or fast ski boats. One of the club's missions is to teach each other about safe boating and etiquette. A benefit of membership is a free vessel check, which ensures boats have all the U.S. Coast Guard recommended safety equipment.

The club sponsors monthly boat rides, offering a great way for queer boaters to meet one another. "We cruise while we cruise," Sundstrom laughs. They even have events on dry land during the winter months.

Much like old car aficionados, club members point out different boats as we ride by. Sundstrom says the group offers lots of opportunities for members to get together and talk about their love of the water. Commodore Edd Scott adds, "The club is for anyone who has a boat or who doesn't have a boat but would like one someday."

As the weather turned cloudy and rain began to fall, Scott and Sundstrom began swapping stories about near misses and boats capsizing near the mouth of the Columbia River in Astoria. Pushing away thoughts of the Minnow and desert islands, I asked each about what got them interested in boating.

Scott and vice commodore Alison Mazon are the most experienced of the club members I met. Scott loves the water so much he lives on a houseboat near Sauvie Island. The 72-year-old began water skiing more than 40 years ago. In his younger years, he would take his boat down the Columbia and up the Pacific to the San

Juan Islands and float around all summer long, often catching dinner right out of Puget Sound.

"You're like a turtle," Scott says about why he loves boating. "You've got your food, your lodging, everything you need. In a half an hour you can be far, far away from town."

Scott has been a member of other yachting clubs in Portland and, while he didn't find them unfriendly, he wanted to start a club specifically for gay, lesbian, bi and trans boaters. He co-founded the group three years ago with Ray Wilston, the oldest member (although he won't reveal his age).

"Some people own houses at the beach or the mountains," Scott says. "But then, that is where they go. With a boat, you can go anywhere."

Mazon was stressed out in high-tech corporate Southern California when she took her first boat ride in 1975. She went out for an evening excursion with a co-worker and within a month she owned his boat. That ride "was the best thing that ever happened to me," she smiles. Now the 60-year-old sails a 30-foot sailboat and makes her living as a marine surveyor (like a home inspector for boats).

Sundstrom and McDonald-O'Leary met Mazon when they set out to make a new purchase. "We had a romantic thing about a wooden boat," McDonald-O'Leary explains. When Mazon came to inspect a boat they were thinking of buying, she took one look at them and told the two skippers about the queer yacht club. Which was fine with them. "As new boaters, we wanted to have people who could teach us," McDonald-O'Leary notes.

They've gotten that and so much more from membership.

The club will be marching in the Portland Pride parade June 20. (Just look for the group with a boat.) Members also invite interested parties to come down to RiverPlace Marina for a cruise during Pride weekend. (Look for the rainbow flags or, as they're known on the water, rainbow burgees.)

McDonald-O'Leary expertly steered the large vessel across a tricky crosscurrent into the tight docking spot, impressing everyone on board. I, for one, was relieved to see dry land and no sign of palm trees.

Contact the PACIFIC COAST YACHT CLUB at 503-345-8523.

KATHY BELGE is a Portland free-lance writer.