



We're here for you

OAKLAND
(510) 428-3558

SAN FRANCISCO
(415) 353-2808

SAN RAMON
(925) 979-3430

WALNUT CREEK
(925) 979-3430

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Rowing through the pandemic



Shirley DeFrancisci, DeF-Stop Photography

Matty Shepherd, Head of the Oak Regatta, at San Pablo Reservoir on Oct. 17.



Danielle DeFrancisci rowing during the Tail of the Turkey Regatta, at the Oakland Estuary on Nov. 21.

By Jon Kingdon

Rowing (crew) is a sport whose origins reach back to Ancient Egyptian times. Modern rowing as a competitive sport can be traced to the early 17th century when races (regattas) were held between professional watermen on the River Thames in London. Since 1974, the Oakland Strokes rowing club has carried on this tradition for middle and high school students on the Oakland Estuary.

In March, with the onset of the coronavirus, the staff of Oakland Strokes, utilizing great anticipation and perspicacity, quickly realized that eight-person crews would not be at all workable with the anticipated social distancing rules. According to Dana Hooper, the executive director at Oakland Strokes, "We had a group discussion about what was happening with the coronavirus and someone mentioned only using single boats. I can't claim that I had that moment of clarity but I immediately put in an order for more singles. We may have been the first club to put in a big order and we soon went

from 16 single boats to 30. We had to get creative putting all of the other boats into the nooks and crannies of our boat house to be able to fit in the new boats, but it's definitely been worth it."

Rowing in an eight-person boat and then rowing as a single is a major change for the rowers. "It's a huge adjustment," said Hooper. "It's a little bit like trying to learn how to write with a different hand."

Steve Stewart, a native Australian who has coached all over the world, has been the Director of Men's Rowing at Oakland Strokes since 2019 and lives in Orinda. He saw firsthand the initial difficulty some of the rowers had in adjusting to a single boat. "The first six weeks, there were a number of kids that were falling out of the boats, though none in the last six weeks," Stewart said. "There also had to be a bit of a mind shift. In the eight-man boat, the pressure is on you to not let your teammates down. In the single, the pressure is to not let yourself down."

Danielle DeFrancisci, a junior at Campolindo, has

been rowing with Oakland Strokes since the seventh grade, used her experience to adjust to the demands put on her in the single boat. "It was somewhat difficult," DeFrancisci said, "but I already had the foundation and rowing has taught me to tackle new challenges by being coachable and open to criticism so I was able to pick it up rather quickly."

Even with a grandfather, a father and two brothers who were rowers along with an uncle who rowed in the Barcelona Olympics, Matty Shepherd, a senior at Acalanes, did not join Oakland Strokes until his junior year only at the urging of a friend and describes it now as "one of the best experiences of my life."

In a sport that demands extreme effort and discipline, the camaraderie in the eight-man boat is what allows the rowers to fight through what Stewart concedes "is not an easy or really fun sport."

It's the group mentality that Shepherd found most satisfying, "You don't want to let down your coaches and teammates. If you don't like to

work hard, it's not the right sport for you. You just fight through it and you figure that out on your own."

Shepherd is one of those who has yet to fall out of the single boat, and accepted the challenge of rowing in a single head-on. "I had to restart because sculling in the single boat (sweeping in the eight-man boat) is a new stroke, but the hardest part was learning to balance in the boat. Even though I am pushing myself in the single, we are all close enough to be able to hear each other and are able to work together that way."

The ability of the rowers to adjust to the new conditions has been a key to the success of the program through these difficulties. "I've been pleased at the resiliency of the kids," said Hooper. They're not in the same boat together but metaphorically they are, in that they are all trying to do the same thing."

Cooper Alford, a senior at Campolindo, has been rowing for nearly five years and is one of the most senior rowers at Oakland Strokes, so for him it was not quite as difficult to

adjust to the single boats: "I had some experience with singles. However, even some of the seniors struggled initially with it. In a single boat, when you make a change, it's immediately apparent. You have to have the right posture with sharper, cleaner rowing strokes. I'm more than certain that this will translate well when we get back to eight-man boats."

Even though the rowers are putting in the same effort they did prior to the pandemic, the competitions and regattas were canceled, much to the dismay of everyone. "That's one of the big things I missed," Shepherd said. "From getting on the bus with the team and being together and enjoying each other's company. Now we get in trouble if we get within six feet of each other. It's totally different."

To compensate for the lack of regattas, Oakland Strokes put on their own competitions among themselves with the single boats. The last race for the fall season was on Dec. 12, though the weather did not cooperate.

... continued on Page C2

0/0/0/100 | 15/15/0/100 | 40/40/0/100

Classified • Classified • Classified • Classified • Classified • Classified • Classified

Music Lessons

Fun Piano Lessons
Learn your favorite song! I teach Certificate of Merit. BM & MM in Piano. Lessons in your home. 925-984-8322. lynn253@gmail.com

Insurance

Totalintegrityinsurance.com
20+yr Lamorinda resident. My independent insurance brokerage is here to serve you. Over 100 top carriers = great pricing and coverage for Biz Gen Liability, W Comp, Homes, Auto, Life. **Call Henry at (925) 247-4356** OE90108

Fencing

Custom Quality Fencing

925-938-9836

- Good Neighbor Fence
- Deer Fencing
- Picket/Split Rail
- RV Gates
- Trellis and Arbors
- Retaining Walls
- Insurance/Storm Repairs

licensed, bonded & insured. CA#667491

Real Estate

NEED TO SELL YOUR HOUSE?
We'll buy "AS IS" condition, all CASH offer, NO closing costs, NO realtor commissions!
Call now: 925-800-7510
info@discoverpropertiesolutions.com
www.discoverpropertiesolutions.com

Construction

Concept Builders
Remodeling, Home Repair & New Construction
Bonded & Insured. License no. 842563 (925) 283-8122, Cell: (925) 768-4983

House Cleaning

www.totalclean.biz
Serving Lamorinda since 1985. Insured and bonded 376-1004.

Handyman

Quetzal Handyman AC Service
NO JOB TOO SMALL
Electrical, plumbing, concrete, driveways & more...
Please call Carlos Toledo
510-689-7490

Plumbing

WE HOP TO IT!
(925) 377-6600
LeapFrogPlumbing.com

\$10 per 1/2" classified ad height.
Email to: classified@lamorindaweekly.com

Rusty Nails Handyman Service
Repair • Restore • Revamp
Call Rusty- (925) 890-1581

Tile Setting

Baths, Showers, Floors, Walls, Counters
Cliff 510-697-1125