

SEA NOTES: Cronin opens window to the world

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Today marks the second full day of racing outside Sippican Harbor for the 88 women competing in the 2008 J-24 International Women's Open championship.

The event kicked off Thursday evening at the Beverly Yacht Club in Marion with a slide presentation by Carol Cronin of Woods Hole, who herself is competing in this weekend's races at the helm of Talking Heads. A competitor in the Yngling event in the 2004 Athens Olympics, Cronin entertained an audience of nearly 100 racers, volunteers, club members and guests with photos from yacht races she has competed in all over the world.

Of particular interest were a slew of photos from Qingdao, China, the venue for the 2008 Olympic sailing events. Cronin competed there in 2006 where, she said, "they could've hosted an Olympics then."

Air quality in Qingdao ranges from "mediocre to really bad," she noted. However, she showed one photo of gorgeous mountains surrounding the port city.

"The mountains can be beautiful, and the air can be fine," said Cronin. But, she said, most days bad air quality prevents residents and tourists alike from getting a full view of the sea and the surrounding countryside.

She showed a photo of racers checking out a wall mural of the Olympics through time which she described as "spectacular." Pictures of high tech seawalls, boat ramps and lifts competed with shots of churling sea water filled with mountains of seaweed and rotting sewage.

"They're working hard to clean it up," said Cronin, adding, "you don't want to go swimming there."

In Qingdao, a city of 9 million people, she noted that "you can't go anywhere without seeing a sign or a banner for the Olympics." And that was two summers ago. The Chinese are "extremely excited" about hosting the 2008 Olympics, she said.

This weekend's J-24 Women's Open marks the second time the BYC has managed the event. After fielding one of the most solid J-24 fleets around — which includes five women-owned boats — the BYC played host to the 2006 Women's Open, which offered one berth at the J-24 Worlds to the winner.

This year's Women's Open offers two berths to the Worlds to the top two finishers in the three-day event, which began Friday and continues Sunday, ending with an awards ceremony at the Front Street yacht club following the final race of the day.

Organizer Nanna Buckley said the 88 competitors are balanced by 50 volunteers who are managing all aspects of the race onshore and on the water.

"It's a fantastic turnout," she said.

The theme of Cronin's talk was "Opportunities for Women in Competitive Sailing," and she had a couple of recommendations for the crowd on hand for Thursday's opening event.

Cronin highly recommends match racing as a way for women to compete.

"It's a great way to get racing experience," she explained of match racing (which will be on the docket for the 2012 Olympics). "And, the boats are provided."

The other great event she recommends, adding "you get the bigger bang for the buck," is the Rolex

Women's Keelboat Challenge, which is held in odd-numbered years at various venues around the U.S. She showed photos from the 2003 Rolex, held in Annapolis, and the 2007 race, held in Houston. Next year's Rolex will also be raced in Houston.

The Rolex is raced in J-22's with four-member crews instead of the five-women crews racing in the J-24's.

Cronin noted that work and family commitments often prevent sailors from committing full-time to preparing to race a national or international event. She pointed out that this year's crop of Olympic sailors who will compete next month in Qingdao, China, are "part of the next generation of Olympic sailing" in that their full-time job is mounting an Olympic campaign.

"This is all they do," she said of this year's Yngling, Laser, 470, coed racing and windsurfing medal prospects.

Cronin wound up her talk this way: "There are a lot of different options for women in racing. But above all, remember to have a good time."

Boating Safety for 4th of July

Next weekend is the Fourth of July, America's busiest boating holiday. The Boat U.S. Foundation for Boating Safety and Clean Water offers ten tips to help you stay safe this July 4th holiday.

1. Put safety into your weekend plan: The Foundation's free Online Boating toolbox at <http://www.BoatUS.com/Foundation/Guide> has helpful information on trip planning and preparation, boating equipment, emergency preparation, navigation, and quizzes to test your knowledge. The Foundation also offers a free online boating safety course for residents of more than 30 states at <http://www.BoatUS.org/Onlinecourse>
2. "Little" guests need life jackets: Everyone wants to be on the boat this holiday weekend, but do you have the right-sized life jacket aboard for visiting children? The Boat U.S. Foundation loans children's life jackets for free at more than 350 marinas, fuel docks, and other waterfront businesses and boat clubs. To find a location near you go to <http://www.BoatUS.com/Foundation/LJLP>
3. Take your time to get home: July 4th is the one time a year many fair-weather boaters — who may rarely navigate in the dark — venture out after the sun goes down. The most reported type of boating accident is a collision with another vessel, so keep your speed down, post an extra lookout, and ensure all your navigation lights work. A spotlight is a must, and ensure all safety gear is onboard.
4. Wear life jackets: Almost three-quarters of all fatal boating accident victims drowned, and of those, 87 percent were not wearing a life jacket.
5. Don't overload your boat: Resist the urge to invite more friends or family to the fireworks show than what your boat is designed to carry. Heavily loaded small boats, and those with little freeboard such as bass boats, are more susceptible to swamping from weather or wake action associated with heavy July 4 boating traffic.
6. It's a long day: A full day in the sun increases the effects of alcohol on the body, so it's better to wait until you're safely back at the dock or home before having a drink. Bring lots of water aboard, a VHF radio, and check weather reports to avoid storms.
7. Know how to get back in the boat: If someone falls overboard, it can turn into a life-threatening situation pretty quickly, especially for small boats without built-in boarding ladders. Invest in a rope or metal ladder that fits your boat to avoid mishaps. Bring along extra line.
8. Never run the engine when swimmers are in the water: Raft-ups, groups of boats tied together in a

protected anchorage, is a great way to spend the holiday with fellow boating enthusiasts. But never run an engine or a generator with swimmers in the water near exhaust ports or propellers. Even though the boat's transmission may not be in gear, propellers can rotate, and odorless, colorless carbon monoxide can quickly overcome swimmers.

9. Take a local boating safety class: The Foundation has most complete list of boating safety courses taught in communities across the country. To find one near you, go to <http://www.BoatUS.com/CourseLine>

10. Cruising offshore? An emergency position indicating rescue beacon (EPIRB) from the Boat U.S. Foundation's EPIRB rental program can provide the margin of safety you need during an offshore passage. EPIRBs rent for just \$40 per week (plus shipping). Go to <http://www.BoatUS.com/Foundation/Epirb>

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