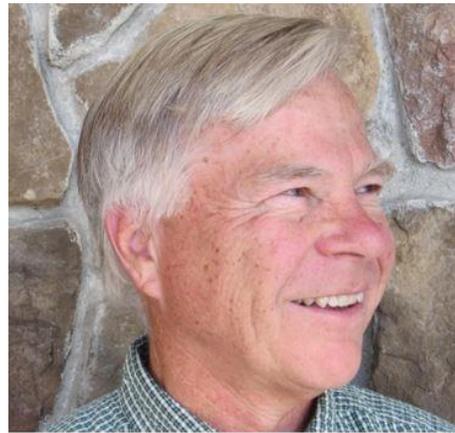


Q & A WITH STEVE WELLS

TWA members and others are talking to writer Sharon Babcock about enduring inspirations, life lessons, and perspectives from their experiences on the working waterfront.

*This month's feature: **Steve Wells**, owner of Evergreen Rowing.*

"I had taken my rowing shell to the dealer to be repaired. He told me he had decided to sell his dealership and wondered if I knew anyone who might be interested. A week later I was a dealer. I continued for a couple of years as a full-time state employee and sold boats after hours and on weekends. Then I got smart," says Steve Wells, owner of Evergreen Rowing, rower, and rowing instructor.



Q: Why do people row?

A: Because it's fun. When it captures your mind it's a way to get away from the cell phone, politics, the economy, relatives, and other distractions. The brain has to concentrate enough when you're rowing so that all those other things melt away. The boats are responsive enough that you have to pay attention to what you're doing. It's a great workout for building strength and aerobic fitness, and it's easier on the body than running. Combining the focus with the endorphins from the workout is restorative. It requires no gasoline and comes with the pure pleasure of being close to the water, wildlife, and peace. So it's both physical and metaphysical.

It is a niche sport, not like baseball. There are thousands of passionate rowers in the U.S. and millions around the world. Introverts can do it alone with nobody talking to them; extroverts enjoy going to have a beer after the extensive workout. Achievers are drawn to it because the rewards are immediate and you can be in command. Those who appreciate beauty think of it as dancing.

The recent bestselling book *The Boys in the Boat* boosted interest in the sport. Whether or not you have an interest in rowing, it is an extremely well-told and captivating story about fortitude, courage, the 1936 Olympic Games, and the history of the Pacific Northwest. Also inspiring to locals has been the far-reaching personal rowing ventures of several University of Puget Sound graduates. Now called OAR Northwest, it has matured beautifully into a sustainable not-for-profit marine adventure education organization, exploring the world's waters under human power, delivering innovative science, technology, engineering, and math curriculum to school students and information for the rest of us about what goes on in the ocean.

Q: What is the best part of your job?

A: In my former state government work (in growth management) in a politically intense bureaucratic environment, nobody smiled at me when I came to visit them. Conversely,

delivering a rowing boat to people feels for me like being Santa Claus. This past weekend I introduced three children to sculling in Donnelly, Idaho. There is a special boat designed for kids to use that is small and stable. With minimal coaching, you can invite them to simply get into the boat and play. It is always fun to see how they take to it. For adults, the stroke in sculling is counterintuitive. Adults tend to struggle and overthink it. Young people, as young as four years old, figure out what feels better and intuitively get the key parts of the rowing stroke-- feathering, squaring up, driving with your legs, and correct posture.

Q: What is distinctive about rowing on Commencement Bay?

A: We have many assets. We live in a place that opens a rower to the experience of Puget Sound, moving from the Thea Foss Waterway out to Commencement Bay and then on to Puget Sound. The distinctively deep water of the bay, prevailing winds from the southwest, and a cliff for protection are a boon to boating. Even when there are whitecaps at Browns Point, there can be calm water along Ruston Way. The waters offer seals and orca and winter birds with their spectacular winter plumage. At the southeast end of the Foss Waterway just beyond the new 21st Street Bridge is Waterway Park with its recreational dock for outrigger paddling, dragon boating, kayaking, rowing and sculling. Then at the very south end of the waterway is a wonderful place, a turning basin, to teach beginners. There the waters are calm with few large boats.

Q: What are the future opportunities for Commencement Bay rowers?

A: Not only for rowers, but completing the esplanade from the south end of the Foss Waterway to Pt. Defiance.

Q: What most challenges Commencement Bay rowers?

A: Primarily not having a safe, secure, accessible contained space for safely storing the craft near the water. Tacoma is the only major municipality on the west coast without a boathouse for non-motorized craft. Then access in the sense of more than people simply being able to see the water. For me, it means places to get onto the water safely; that is a different dimension of access. Because of the rip rap along Ruston Way, getting onto the water is challenging to both the rower and to the boat. In addition, wherever you are in this country you need to know how to swim to be safe rowing. So many of the communities we'd like to reach in Tacoma do not have ready access to pools to learn how to swim.

Q: What is your hope?

A: That all human-powered participants -- dragon boaters, the Sea Scouts, rowers, scullers, stand-up paddlers, kayakers, tribal canoe paddlers, Ki Ka Ha (outrigger canoe club), and future visitors possibly renting rowboats on Ruston Way -- are successful in their adventures.