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‘The House that Generosity Built’

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‘The House that Generosity Built’

Donor-funded sailing center to debut on RWU campus early this summer

BRISTOL, R.I. — Just a few yards upshore of Mount Hope Bay, tucked away under a canopy of maple trees on the Roger Williams University campus, sits an unassuming and weathered storage shed flanked by a port-a-john and an empty boat rack. For decades it has served as headquarters to some of college sailing’s emerging stars – including national champions and Olympians – a small, but proud, symbol of the Hawks’ outsized talent and tenacity despite lacking the kind of facilities that typically accompany a nationally ranked college sailing program.

It’s easy to understand, then, the palpable excitement emanating from a cohort of alumni, administrators, students and their families as they stand amid the steel infrastructure and flapping tarps of a waterfront construction site where the Richard L. Bready Mount Hope Bay Sailing and Education Center was officially dedicated in early May as part of the 2015 Captain’s Cup regatta. The Center is named for Board of Trustees Chairman Richard Bready, whose $1 million gift launched the multi-year campaign that brought the University’s first fully donor-funded building to campus.

“When even the students are paying to build something, it’s incredible,” Chairman Bready said during the dedication. “Because that never happens.”
The two-story 6,450-square-foot building features a wraparound viewing deck; a boat bay, repair area and equipment storage; a multipurpose room and classroom; locker rooms and showers – and even a washroom with baby-changing facilities for those extreme boaters out on the bay in need of a quick pit-stop, architect Andrew Cohen (a principal at ACTWO Architects and a School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation faculty member) joked during the building tour. The building is positioned as close to the waterfront as coastal zone management policies allow, and at 17 feet 2 inches above sea level, is just 5 inches higher than FEMA regulations require.

“It doesn’t quite have the character of a shed,” University President Don Farish quipped as the group—all donors who helped to finance the $3 million building—gazed in wonder at what has been described as “the house that generosity built.”

“The Sailing and Education Center is a tribute, a monument really, of the belief that the philanthropic community had in this project,” Farish said during the dedication, noting that the campaign committee—which comprised alumni, parents and grandparents—contributed more than 40 percent of the funding. It is both sad and poignant, he said, knowing that many of the donors’ children will never reap the opportunities of the Center—but it demonstrates what he called “legacy thinking,” that we can all pay it forward.

Executive Director of US Sailing Jack Gierhart praised the innovative and transparent approach that the University took to creating the sailing center, hailing it as a hub both for collegiate sailing and the entire sport.

“College sailing is a hotspot of the sport right now,” he said. “A lot of people are coming in, and it’s what’s keeping the sport alive. US Sailing is looking forward to leveraging it across the state and the sport of sailing.”

Transformation was a running theme throughout the dedication of the Center, not only that the presence of the building has changed the landscape of the campus, but also that it signals new opportunities not only for the sailing program but also for the academic community at Roger Williams.

“It really provides a campus on the water its missing puzzle piece and opens the door to the top-level sailing talent,” said Alex Rudkin ’14, a member of the campaign committee and a three-year sailing team captain. “Many more people will learn that Roger Williams is not just a great place for sailing, but a great school as well.”

The Bready Center will not only host sailing competitions, but also classes, providing opportunities for marine biology students to learn just feet away from the water, as well as provide space for the Center for Economic and Environmental Development, which Bristol Town Administrator Tony Teixeira noted is vital to conservation efforts and the economic vitality of marine trades in the region. Vice President for Institutional Advancement echoed the sentiment, citing the Sailing and Education Center as “a gift for all students,” and a resources for both the campus and external communities.
And perhaps no one is more excited for the Center’s launch than sailing Head Coach Amanda Callahan, whose effusive gratitude could only be bested by the kudos she earned for her perseverance and determination to build an elite program regardless of the resources available to her.

“This is our opportunity to thank everyone from all of our hearts,” Callahan said as she kicked off the dedication. “We will keep on saying it, and still won’t say it enough.”

The Richard L. Bready Mount Hope Bay Sailing and Education Center is scheduled to open early this summer, and will play host to the 2015 U.S. Youth Sailing Championship – a signature US Sailing regatta – from July 6 to 10.