

FAMILY DAY

IN THE INTEREST OF SELF-PRESERVATION, STALWARTS OF THE O'DAY DAY SAILER ARE SHIFTING ATTENTION TO THEIR YOUNGER SAILORS.

ON THE SHORE of Lake Massapoag, Mass., Ellen Fuller is busily tying her dinghy boots while an audience of friends bombard the 14-year-old with questions: Will she get wet? What if the boat tips over? She fields them with a mix of youthful enthusiasm and teenage apathy.

"I think I'll get really good at sailing and then we can become a team," says one friend.

Fuller smiles, nods enthusiastically, and fastens the Velcro on her boots. Today, she's sailing in the Day Sailer Junior National Regatta with her aunt Allison and mother Natalie as crew.

"I think it's really fun," says Fuller. "I'm not really used to the Day Sailer. I sail 420s most of the time, but it's easy to learn."

Like her older sister Sarah, who won the Day Sailer Junior Nationals in 2009, Fuller has had a diverse youth-sailing experience, which her mother hopes to parlay into a long sailing career.

"A lot of youth programs sail only with the Opti and 420," says Natalie Fuller-Coleman. "And those are such strict one-design boats. I think it's important to introduce the flexibility they'll need in different boats along the way. The Day Sailer opens their eyes to other types of rigs and setups. I have three daughters and I've in-

troduced them all along the way to the Day Sailer in order to expand their horizons, and also to continue the tradition of women sailing in our family."

It's this generational continuity, and the enthusiasm young sailors bring, which the Day Sailer class is cultivating in effort to maintain interest in the 56-year-old design first built by O'Day Sailboats in 1958. While remaining true to its intent as a family-oriented, easy-to-sail one-design, class officers struggle with winning membership and regatta attendance. Its future lies in younger sailors, but more specifically in youth-driven family racing. As author Nicholas Hayes encourages in his book *Saving Sailing*, the class management is making a concerted effort to pair adults and youth together in the same boat, literally.

At the 1999 Day Sailor North Americans, many of the adult competitors had young sailors crewing for them, says Bob Blake, VP of youth development.

"We didn't have a lot of youth who were actually steering the boat, and we wanted them to get the experience and just get them out sailing. After the races were over, we asked the skippers if they'd flip-flop with the juniors. They did it, and it went really well."

The Day Sailer Junior Nationals took root that day and was formalized five years later. Any sailor 18 or under is eligible to skipper, allowing them to independently tackle the course.

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The Day Sailer Class's youth sailors, affectionately referred to as 'utes by adults, have sustained their numbers even as overall class participation has waned. With next year's championship taking place on Cape Cod, class leaders have high hopes for the Junior National Regatta. Ellen Fuller, above at the helm, competes at the Junior Nationals on Lake Massapoag (Mass.).

Photos: Deborah Mason-McCaffrey

ers, that's great. But what we really want is to get them out there in general, get them steering."

Perhaps it's the anticipation of summer vacation, or the infectious energy of the curious friends who gather to watch the racing, but the junior sailors arriving in the picturesque town of Sharon, Mass., are ready to wrest the tillers from the adults. On the first day of races Fuller sails alongside six other junior boats, her long ponytail skimming the water as she hikes out in the puffs. Her family's

black-hulled Day Sailer glides easily through the lake's smooth surface and after two afternoons of casual racing she finishes second overall.

"I was really impressed that the kids were really good at sailing," says Fuller. "There was even a 10-year-old boy who was really good, even when it was a little fluky. It wasn't as intense or scary as I thought it would be—it was actually really fun. If we keep our Day Sailer, I'd love to race with my mom and aunt again and again." ♡