



ESTABLISHED 1872

SANTA BARBARA YACHT CLUB

Note: Since beginning this series, I have, for the most part, interviewed staff commodores in their order of having served. This month, with the permission of his 3 preceding commodores, I have chosen to highlight Staff Commodore Jim Rudy, who passed away on February 7, 2009. Jim was one of the first people who really got us involved in SBYC when we joined in 1995.

James A. Rudy 1994

Staff Commodore Jim Rudy was born in Columbus, OH, where he was tied for oldest in a family of five children. “Actually, my twin was alleged to be an hour and fifteen minutes older. For 30 or 35 years, I lofted various arguments that I was actually the older. For example, I read (or invented?) somewhere that in Chinese families, the first-born of twins is the younger, under the “package of ping-pong balls” model of Last In – First Out. There were other, equally unpersuasive arguments. As we “matured” though, the issue seemed to become less important, even counter-desirable.”

Jim became interested in boating as a youngster. He and his twin brother Jack spent two or three consecutive summers at YMCA camp. “Everyone who could swim out to the raft and back had rowboat privileges. Those who could swim clear across the lake; canoe privileges. Those who could swim across AND back were rewarded with sailboat privileges (a Lightning, as I recall) and instructions “howda.” Being competitive types, early in our second year, we earned the sailboat prize, and we kind of never let it fade. Eventually, we brought a Sunfish to our Lake Erie summer get-togethers, and we never looked back.”

Years later, Jim took up flying, as well. Apparently, that never really settled well with his wife Joyce and the family, so he suggested buying a Highlander instead of continuing to fly. “She agreed with such enthusiasm that I knew I could have asked for more. We campaigned that Highlander for five or so years before moving to Newport Beach in 1966.”

While living in the Midwest, Jim and Joyce had been members of Edgewater Yacht Club in Cleveland. When they moved to Newport Beach, they joined Balboa Yacht Club. So by the time they moved to Santa Barbara, being part of a yacht club “and ladies’ bridge at the Club, were in our blood.”

Jim had a lot to say about his reasons for going through the chairs and becoming commodore. “Well, I guess it was ego... the feeling that my talents were vitally essential. This of course is an illusion that is quickly and brutally quashed when one realizes that the ole club has run very well without my steadying hand on the helm. But we really were a very much less sophisticated group in 1991. I was race director for a number of years, [and] treasurer for a couple of years. This covered the watershed changes of the licensing of our logo to Japanese marketers of clothing and do-dads. That infusion was somewhat controversial in the minds of some of our members, but it allowed the Club to address years of deferred maintenance and facility upgrades. In my prejudiced view, those years were climate changers at SBYC.”

Jim felt his most special contribution to SBYC began with a phone call from a staff commodore of Encinal Yacht Club in Alameda who wanted to “come down to check out the facility as a possible new destination for their annual Coastal Cup race from San Francisco to Catalina.” The phone call resulted in a ten-year commitment from Jim and roughly a dozen dedicated and hospitality-oriented members who met with many challenges. “We met every finisher at the finish line off our deck. The first year, the nighttime finishers had a difficult time finding our finish line, so Arch Montgomery and I located a commercial airliner strobe light and evolved the design of a battery-powered strobe, all neatly packaged in a virtually hermetic 55-gallon drum. The design changed every year. The first year, we had a photo-electric switch which would sense sundown and turn it on. But Arch failed to account for the light leakage between the sensor and the strobe, so it would blink a couple of times and then decide it was morning, and go out. So we had to do some on-the-water retrofitting to employ a much less sexy manual switch. One year, the waves were so high that we sweated its physical integrity. But it barely survived the last finisher. As I recall, the duration of the light’s watch was usually two or three nights. “This association gained me enough interest in the Encinal crowd that I pulled rank with Scott Deardorff, our designated skipper in their annual Centennial Regatta on the Bay. That year, it was sailed Express 37s. We came in second as I recall, and the all-around experience was wonderful.” As Jim spent more and more time at the Club, the more special it became for him. It gave him “an anchor and continuity and a cherished scrapbook of memories.”

“Thanks for the experience.” Thank you, Jim. You will be missed.

By Sabrina Papa