



SANTA BARBARA

YACHT CLUB

Kent R. Pierce, 2001

It has long been said that our beautiful state really ought to be separated into two because of the differences between Southern California and its residents and our northern counterparts. While interviewing Staff Commodore Kent Pierce, who grew up an hour north of San Francisco in Santa Rosa, I finally learned the true reason for these sentiments: a simple 3-letter word which, ironically, is part of a great connector of the state. Ready? The main difference between us and them is that, in Kent's words, "in Northern California you don't say "the"101; it's just 101". So, there you have it. I wonder if Kent also secretly knows the true root of the Hatfield/McCoy conflict?

As a youth, Kent learned to sail through his local parks and rec. "While racing was the focus of the program...it was nothing like the racing my kids are doing." Regardless, it was an effective introduction for him. "I remember late in summer, going to sailing, getting changed in the boathouse, and my mom picking me up for football practice." During high school, his time and interest in sailing waned.

Kent defected to Santa Barbara in 1982 to attend UCSB, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies (Economics, Communications and Political Science). His junior year set the stage for this rabid (oops, I mean avid) sailor who is known not only up and down the coast, but in waters all around the US, to really dive into the sport.

While attending UCSB, Kent worked at W.A. King, an upscale men's clothing store in La Arcada shopping center. One of his coworkers, and now SBYC member, Clif Leonard, invited him to sail on a J/24 called OJ, "owned by some guy named Dexter Goodell – ever heard of him?" He went on to race with Glenn Bjorkman and Bob Miller on Firedrill, and Jeff Berkus and Jeff Wilkes, a former sail maker, on Ice Nine, "one of the fastest J/24s on the planet". Ice Nine and its crew traveled regularly to regional and national regattas, "and had a pretty solid team including a girl named Jeanene Lucas". Hmm. Doesn't Kent have a wife named Jeanene, and sons named Lucas and Matthew? Okay, now I understand the draw of Ice Nine.

When Jeff Berkus moved to Texas and took his J/24 with him, Kent starting racing with sail maker Chris Snow. He gained the majority of his high-level sailing experience while racing around the country for the next 7 or 8 years in countless J/24 and Melges 24 championship races.

Despite all his traveling and racing, Kent found the time to marry and help create 2 more little sailors. His time and schedule now less flexible, he switched his sailing focus from crew positions to skippering. He resurrected the J/24 Watermelon under the watchful eye of friend and mentor Bill Matson and sailed in local Wet Wednesday and Sailing Club races. When Eric Stokke, his eventual boat partner, began sailing with him, Kent gained experiences that allowed him "to flourish as a helmsman. Beyond Eric's great talent as a trimmer, Eric is able to put up with my type-A personality and propensity to blame others for my mistakes."

By now you may have noticed a common thread in this article; with few exceptions, is the presence and guidance of SBYC members. "It's SBYC members that have given me the opportunity to learn and enjoy my life's sporting passion: sailing!" So when these members encouraged Kent to join SBYC, it was a natural next

step. In the mid-1980s, there was a great vibe in the Club with the Deardorffs, Matt Wilson, the previously-mentioned members, and Kent felt he had to be a part of it.

Kent became more involved in the Club and its many activities. When he had been on the board of directors as secretary for 6 years, Vice Commodore Gene Glover recommended him for the position of rear commodore for the upcoming year. Since Kent was so young (only 36 years old when he became commodore) Gene nicknamed him the “Young Turk”.

Kent’s Opening Day was memorable. “The weather was horrible. It was raining, windy and overall, just miserable. The traditional boat parade wasn’t going to happen, but we still had a 2-hour gap to fill in the program. So, a few of us grabbed one of the giant SBYC burgees, ran it up the backstay of Watermelon and sailed back and forth in front of the Club a few times. The wind had backed off considerably, probably only blowing 15, but because of the rain and dark sky, it still looked like it was blowing 30. Despite the rain, it was actually kind of a cool experience. We drank a few beers and had a good time with it. It created this great Washington-crossing-the-Delaware type of visual.” As a member who was present that day, I can tell you his account is not an exaggeration!

Kent has made numerous valuable contributions to our Club. Due to space constrictions, we’ll keep it down to 2. For years, the race committee chair (currently Dana Jones’s position) was a volunteer position. Kent, having raced at so many clubs, realized it was “a full-time job to try to do all this stuff”. A position was created to serve the racing needs of both the Yacht Club and Youth Sailing Foundation, and brilliantly filled by the hiring of Jeff Grange. Also, as most members know, Kent took over as president of the SBYSF from Guy Turner (1998), improving year after year on Guy’s vision.

In return, the Club has given Kent “my marriage...2 great kids, a great life and great friendships. I still get jazzed up on a Wet Wednesday afternoon. The Club has given me a conduit to that passion.” It also offers a comfortable and welcoming place to spend time with friends. As Kent and I watched his boys sail into the harbor at the end of our interview, he summed up his feelings about the Club and wishes for its members by simply saying, “Relax and enjoy it.”