

Rowing and Sailing Stories



Kenneth Muhammad and Mt. Baker Junior Crew Teammates

Seattle Parks and Recreation’s small craft programs have had significant impacts on the lives of participants. Many have asked to share their stories in order to add a personal perspective to the SLI response.

I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed working with everyone at regional’s last weekend. It was a great opportunity to get acquainted with other Mt Baker parents and experience some exciting racing. I heard many compliments regarding you and your team’s ability to coordinate everything.

As I have probably mentioned to you, our son Louis previous to last summer had never found a sport that he was interested in. In fact he struggled with coordination problems and was unable to shoot a basketball or catch a fly ball. I signed Louis up for summer rowing camp last year and he was hooked from the get go. His computer was abandoned! Louis signed up for fall and made all but one practice, it was heartwarming to see his enthusiasm and commitment. All systems were go for winter conditioning when, you may recall, Louis had an accident at school and as a result his spleen ruptured in early December. Louis underwent exploratory surgery and came home five days later with a big scar right down the center of his belly. This was tough on him emotionally as well as physically and he was nervous to even think about rowing. But it was spring season that inspired him to get well and after a few days when he realized that he could lift the boat in and out of the water with his team, he was off to the races, (so to speak).

Unfortunately, without his spleen, Louis’s immune system is challenged for awhile until the rest of his body can chip in. So Louis was sick a couple of times and missed a bunch of practices. Even though he had hoped to be in the Novice “A” boat at regional’s, he understood and even empathized with what a difficult job it must be for the coaches to make the boat selections. As he put it, “I have four more

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years". I was astounded at his attitude. What being involved with Mt Baker crew had done for his emotional growth in just one year amazed me.

As things turned out, it was the B boat that got a taste of success. When the Novice 4 B took the bronze on Friday those kids looked like they had won the gold at the Junior Olympics! This winning feeling set the stage for Sunday's race. These kids actually thought they could win and they rowed their hearts out. They were thrilled with their silver medal. This was a first for Louis.

I know that the city is stressed financially and has made some painful cuts to programs such as MBC. And this is why I felt compelled to let you know how much as a parent I appreciate all that you, the coaches, Pat Eadon and Pat and Tom Henry do to support these kids. AND how programs like MBC translate into other aspects of their lives. I know that you are very aware of this but wonder if the folks downtown are. Louis is learning social skills and what it means to be part of a team. What it means to win – together.

Since Louis has missed so much school this year his goal of finishing 8th grade with straight A's, (let me be clear this was his goal not mine), seemed like it might be out of reach. Yesterday he checked his progress online and yelled from the basement, "Mom my grade in Ms. Acosta's class just went up 3%!" I went downstairs to check it out and he said that maybe he will get those A's after all. Louis looked at me and said, "WE GOT THIS". I know where that came from, **M B C**.

I would like to let you know how my family appreciates the sports programs for children, especially the ones on the Green Lake, in the Small Crafts Center.

We are a single parent home, with a child that has gone through a major trauma in her early age, and has been at risk for failing in lot of different areas of her life. It has been difficult to keep her excited or motivated with anything at all, and most of school and after-school-activities had little draw for her, until she became fascinated with boating. I didn't even know she liked water!

My child has been training with the Green Lake Crew since the Summer 2011, and has never been more excited in her whole life. The Green Lake Crew has been the major source of pride and motivation for my daughter. She thinks and talks about rowing all the time, really likes her new friends from the team; and, she is hoping to row through college when she gets older.

If it weren't for Seattle Parks Department classes and programs, my daughter would have fallen through the cracks in the system, since we cannot afford the tuition in most any after school activities in the private sector. My daughter attended after school child care in a Seattle Parks Department Community Center while in the elementary school, took swimming classes in one of the Seattle Parks Department pools, and now she is proudly rowing, and expecting her life to be great, beyond the opportunities normally available to children from a family like her's.

Thank you for making programs like the one at the Green Lake Small Craft Center available to children like mine. It's been lifesaving, literally.

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I will be a senior at the Northwest School. Rowing has been an incredible influence on my life. I started rowing in 8th grade, so as I developed rowing has always been there to help me along. Rowing helped me in every area of my life. Socially it made me comfortable with myself, I learned how to work with others and make friends, and I also learned how to get away from bullying. Academically I learned to have a work ethic. As I got more and more serious about rowing and spent more time rowing, my grades actually got better. Finally, rowing was a sport where I finally was a serious athlete. I played other sports when I was younger (baseball, basketball, soccer, swimming) but I was never that good because I had never gotten the attention and help to become a serious athlete. I got that at Mt Baker. Now I plan on rowing at a division 1 school in college and I hope to make the junior national team next summer. These were things would not have been possible for me until I started rowing.-

I wanted to write to give kudos to the staff that work at the Green Lake Crew program. My son just completed his novice year. My son is a freshman at Roosevelt, and is also a cancer survivor who has struggled with physical and developmental challenges caused by this for most of his life.

When he told me last spring that he wanted to row crew in the fall, I said, “sure,” thinking he’d give it up quickly. He nagged me as school approached and with some concern I signed him up for the program, hoping that the staff would be able to find some place for him. He is a big kid, very strong, but not coordinated due to a stroke he suffered when he was sick. He also has vision and hearing problems. For these reasons, he’s always avoided any kind of a team sport, although he is active and loves the water and the outdoors.

Green Lake – in particularly Jason Frisk, Mpetela (his assistant), and Lucas Ridinger, the Novice Coach – did a wonderful job involving my son and giving him great opportunities to be a part of the team. He rowed in several regattas this season and plans to join again in the fall (he’s traveling a lot this summer or he’d be on the summer crew).

I really can’t speak highly enough of the program. The expectations are set very high. The kids are required to come every day after school for three hours. The weather this year was awful, as you know, and there were many days they were out on the water in less than kind conditions, and many more days they had to find ways to keep the kids working while off the water, and they did. My son stayed motivated and really loved participating. It’s given him an idea of what he can accomplish if he keeps working hard, and made really helped him grow.

Your staff is nothing short of wonderful. They are tough on the kids, that is certain, but clear and consistent, expert at building character in these kids, in creating an inclusive, team-focused group of young adults. They corral us parents into a finely honed volunteer support team, giving us an opportunity to stay involved with our teenager’s lives in ways that I don’t think activities like theater, band or football can really manage.

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I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know what you have there at Green Lake – it's truly a unique, magical program that is changing lives of hundreds of young people. I know it couldn't run nearly as well as it does without the amazing people that are there. I'm very grateful to them and to you for supporting our kids.

Mount Baker Crew completely transformed my high school experience. Not only do I have an amazing community of friends who will stay with me for many years to come, I've also learned loads about myself and what it means to work hard. I've learned what it means to enjoy the products of many hours of work and mental persistence and how to push myself further than what I think may be possible. This translates not only to other athletic endeavors but in all realms of my life. I am so grateful for this program and the people who make it possible!

I was a pretty awkward, unhappy kid when I joined in the spring of my sophomore year. I was struggling with my own identity and really had no strong social ties. Green Lake helped me gain confidence in myself.

The athletic aspect of it transformed me from a chubby 15-year-old to an in-shape 18 year old, and has (hopefully!) set me up for a lifetime of fitness and good health. It also provided me with the discipline and work-ethic necessary in today's world.

The social aspect of it helped make me more at ease with close friendships. The camaraderie--built in blood, sweat, and blisters--greatly developed my social skills. (You can mention that I was diagnosed in my childhood with Aspergers, which is on the mild end of the autism spectrum).

In winter of 2009 I was a registered rower in the Mount Baker Crew Community. After the first week I was hooked; and have been rowing in the three years since. I'm 16 years old and am going into my junior year at The Northwest School this fall. I have switched between being a rower and a coxswain; and have fallen in love with both.

In the summer of that year I did a rowing, sailing, and kayaking camp on Lake Union. I fell in love with the sport but was uneasy about my skill level. When my dad was my age he was a rower through high school and college and loved the idea of me becoming one myself. Then before I knew it, I was enrolled in the program. After my first season on the tea, I was moving up to be a varsity athlete. We talked with some of the girls on Varsity who had also fallen in love with the sport. They said that as a varsity athlete your boat becomes your second family. You're around them so much you consider them your sisters.

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The girls were right. I considered my entire team a second family. Being so close as a team, I found every minute I spent with them absolutely enjoyable. Over time I found myself only wanting to spend time with the girls on my team when we were not at practice. I found myself only calling girls from my team. I loved the acceptance aspect of the sport. No matter what skill level we accepted each other for who we are. We would help one another through anything. We were always there for one another.

No matter what stress, anxiety, worry, or problem that I encounter when I'm at school; I found that once I got to practice I was able to forget about everything that had gone wrong that day. I realized that every day I left practice feeling like I had a fresh start when I went home. The thought of leaving all the girls when I graduate is unbearable. I have a deep whole inside when I think about what life will be like when I graduate in two years and leave the Mount Baker Varsity team.

The Mount Baker community has done so much for me throughout the past three years. I am so happy I got to be an athlete on the Varsity Squad. The past three years have been incredible and I can't wait to see what the final two years with Mount Baker include

Green Lake Crew has played a number of important roles in our sons' lives. Clearly it introduced them to a new sport and got them very physically fit. They became dedicated to the team, spent hours each day, five days a week, and realized an important lesson: Its not about them, its about the team. It is impossible to pick the star out of an eight man shell. It's about doing your best and pulling together as a team. The coaching staff has been excellent. Each of my sons looks up to their coach. One coach was an oarsman from Stanford. My son now wants the opportunity to go to Stanford. He is working harder in school so that can be a reality. The administration of the program runs it like a well oiled machine. Parents are included and helpful; the whole organization makes amazing things happen. Lastly, our sons have made a new group of friends from across the city. These are kids that share a new passion, keep their noses clean and have fun together participating in a great activity that provides them a wonderful view that reaches far beyond the borders of Seattle. I also like to think that they become ambassadors for our city as they travel and wear the uniform of Seattle Parks and Recreation's Green Lake Crew.

Mt. Baker crew is important to me because I have a different live away from school and home. I love crew; for me its one of the few places I can relieve my stress and have fun, while meeting new people all at the same time. It also gives me the chance I can take advantage of is the new places we go every year. And this year I plan to take at least 2 of my boats to nationals and win. That is my goal. I hope to do sprints crew this year. Thank you!!!

We are writing to thank you for providing the fantastic program that our daughter has participated in at Green Lake Crew - Novice Girls. We are so happy that she has found a physical activity that she loves. This has been a great addition to her musical activities. Crew is really helping her to get in shape and keeping her motivated to stay physically fit. She loves the hard physical workouts and the sense of accomplishment she gets from running around the lake and doing conditioning exercises. She likes the

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girl crew team camaraderie and she is proud of herself becoming strong. She definitely loves being able to get out on the water and to go fast. Her willingness and desire to continue winter conditioning (even when they are not going out on the water!) shows how much she enjoys keeping physically active. This program is wonderful and we are so grateful that it exists within the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department. Keep up the good work.

She loved participating in the two regattas this past fall, the Portland Classic and the Frostbite Regatta.

Mt. Baker is a unique and I would argue vital Seattle public facility on Lake Washington. I was born and raised in Madrona a few blocks from the shores of Lake Washington...I remember all too well the 'No swimming' signs posted in our lakefront parks. Thankfully Lake Washington is now restored to a vibrant recreational asset for us all to enjoy, which brings me to the importance of the Mt. Baker Rowing and Sailing Center.

With the increase in all forms of water recreation, like sailing, rowing, canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing, and paddle-boarding, Mt. Baker distinguishes itself as a unique public facility which supports public safety, and public health through the myriad of classes and programs they offer to the general public. Mt. Baker is also credited with developing self-esteem in our youth with the competitive rowing programs. With the increase in access to water activities on Lake Washington there is a real need to provide instruction to the public on how to safely participate in those activities. Without the classes provided by Mt. Baker the public is at greater risk of putting themselves and others in harm's way by the lack of adequate instruction. Mt. Baker is unique in providing those services to the general public.

Another real benefit of Mt. Baker is the role it plays in keeping the public healthy. On this I have a very personal experience. Last May I suffered a near fatal heart attack, total blockage of an artery, called the 'Widow Maker'. If it were not for all the training I participated in on the Adult Crew team I would have not survived the event. My heart was so strong that I not only survived, but my heart was virtually undamaged. Thank you Mt. Baker!

Mt. Baker is a great investment for the City and fills a special need which cannot be assigned to another City facility. While Lake Washington is a local treasure....it can also be a real hazard for those who do not know how to enjoy it safely.

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As a decades-long resident of Mount Baker, I'm proud to have the Mount Baker Rowing and Sailing Center in our neighborhood. Seven days a week, the MBRSC is heavily utilized by people who live all over the city. Residents of South Seattle are especially well served by this jewel of the Parks Department, as young people learn how to enjoy the water resources of our city in safety, and to build their self-confidence by gaining new skills and learn the value of team work and cooperation. As residents of a city surrounded by water, we are very fortunate to have a Parks Department which so effectively leverages thousands of volunteer hours every year to make these programs accessible to everyone. My family is a beneficiary of this—my son participated in the summer boating camp at MBRSC when he was younger, and I learned to row and have joined the early morning rowing group at Mount Baker. On behalf of myself and my Mount Baker neighbors, thank you for continuing your support of this wonderful resource in our community.