

# Campaign for sailing center launched

*By Kelly Skellinger*

BELMAR – The Friends of the Belmar Harbor [FOBH] recently established a temporary home on River Road, here, to kick off the organization’s capital campaign, titled “Sail Don’t Fail,” to build the Shark River Bay Community Sailing Center.

The FOBH, an almost decade-old, grassroots organization, provides sailing programs for youth and local families.

The group is currently seeking to raise \$1.8 million through the campaign to build the center, which will benefit the hundreds of aspiring sailors who register for FOBH sailing programs every year, as well as local residents and FOBH members who wish to use the facility.

The FOBH has already received \$850,000 in matching grants pledged by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program and the New Jersey Department of Transportation Office of Maritime Resources I BOAT New Jersey Program toward the project.

The sailing center – which will be located on the corner of MacClearie Park and the borough’s L Street beach, at the site of the borough’s existing boatyard and sailing center – will allow the FOBH to host, feed and provide bathroom and shower facilities to the sailors who participate in the programs, as well as those who have FOBH memberships and local residents.

The sailing center is projected to be 50 feet wide by 140 feet long. The building will be two stories high and is proposed to include an office for the FOBH, a storage area for the FOBH’s equipment, a workshop for repair and maintenance, a second-floor sail loft for building boats and making and repairing sails, and classrooms for children and adults, as well as other nonprofit groups, to teach sailing safety.

The sailing center project is a joint venture of the FOBH and the Borough of Belmar. The FOBH will be entering into a lease agreement with the borough to lease the Green Acres property, where the sailing center is scheduled to be built.

The FOBH’s makeshift, downtown headquarters is located in a tiny trailer, which has been utilized by the Belmar Police Department in the past, down by the Belmar beachfront during summer months.

The trailer is now nestled alongside the Belmar Arts Council’s [BAC’s] BoatWorks, on River Road, and is equipped with Internet access, working phone lines, electricity and heat. Two desks take up most of the office space, leaving very little room for anything else.

The FOBH recently established its temporary home base in Belmar so interested parties could visit the location from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, to collect more information about the organization and its programs and to drop off their pledges for the capital campaign in person.

Due to the size restrictions of the trailer, FOBH members still continue to meet at the offices of French & Parrello Associates, in Wall, FOBH President David I. Calnan explained last Friday afternoon.

Mr. Calnan, who started working for FOBH five years ago as the group’s treasurer and, soon after, its president, is the senior vice president and director of field and lab services for French & Parrello Associates, an engineer firm, which has been storing all of the FOBH’s records and allowing the group to use its offices for meetings regarding the campaign.

However, the establishment of the FOBH’s temporary base in Belmar is a sure sign that the FOBH’s capital campaign is “off and running,” Mr. Calnan added.

The advisory co-chairs of the FOBH’s capital campaign committee are Monmouth University President Paul G. Gaffney, II and Ocean County College President Jon H. Larson, PhD. Sailing teams at both schools have utilized the FOBH facilities in the past and are currently partnering up to strengthen their ties with the organization for future programs.

Gary Jobson, a world-renowned sailor and Barnegat Bay native, recently lent his name to the FOBH cause, by starring in a video to market the FOBH’s capital campaign. The video can be viewed on the FOBH Web site at [www.fobhnj.org](http://www.fobhnj.org).

The FOBH’s campaign committee is comprised of eight FOBH members. Each committee person has been designated a group of four or five volunteers, who are in charge of soliciting funds from different sources throughout the state.

Five subcommittees have been formed to target five different monetary sources.

One subcommittee is currently in charge of soliciting funds from local businesses, one is in charge of targeting wealthy individuals and one is in charge of contacting corporations which may be interested in donating to the cause.

The other two subcommittees are in charge of contacting residents and officials living in the towns that surround the Shark River Bay area, as well as charitable foundations throughout the state which may want to throw a few dollars the organization's way.

The FOBH will be launching an advertising campaign in local papers over the next couple of weeks, in order to raise more funds for the sailing center.

The FOBH has held the Mayor's Cup Regatta, at the Belmar Marina, each summer for the last three years. Each year, five towns – Avon, Belmar, Wall, Neptune and Neptune City – participate in the event and sponsor a certain number of children from each community to participate in the three-week sailing program.

At the end of the program, the children from each town compete against one another in the Mayor's Cup Regatta.

This year, as part of the FOBH's capital campaign, the FOBH is sponsoring a competition amongst the five towns to see which town can raise the most money for the capital campaign.

Residents will be able to track the fund-raising competition through campaign advertising the FOBH will be running in local newspapers up until June, when the campaign is set to end.

Mr. Calnan explained that while the FOBH has scheduled to terminate the campaign in June, if the organization has not raised sufficient funds by that time, the group will continue raising money until all of the funds have been collected.

One of the reasons that the FOBH is in such dire need to construct a sailing center is due to the fact that more and more children are participating in its extensive list of programs each year.

According to Mr. Calnan, as the number of children registering for the programs increases, the list of programs offered increases and the need for bigger and better facilities grows, as well.

In 2007, the FOBH had over 400 children participate in its sailing programs.

The organization offered a one-week sailing session to children attending Avon Elementary School, which had closed school early late last spring due to construction. A total of 25 students from the school participated in the program.

"The Junior Sailing program was totally maxed out last year," Mr. Calnan said, with 40 children registered for the program's morning sessions and 40 children registered for the program's afternoon sessions.

The Junior Sailing program is geared towards aspiring sailors from five local towns, who express an enthusiasm to heighten their sailing skill levels over the course of three, three-week sailing sessions.

The organization held its third annual Mayor's Cup Regatta last year as well, in which Belmar's Junior Sailing program team took home the trophy.

The FOBH also hosted the Asbury Park City Sailors program and the Newark City Sailors program last year, which encourage children from inner cities to test out their sea legs and learn basic sailing skills on the Shark River Bay.

Last spring and fall, the FOBH offered a club sailing program to high school students from Neptune High School, St. Rose High School, in Belmar, and Wall Township High School on weekday afternoons.

"Our boats are being used now from mid-April through the end of October," Mr. Calnan said, adding that the organization's summer programs have been extended to six-month programs over the last few years.

FOBH membership is "at the highest level it has been since I have been associated with the organization," Mr. Calnan added. "We have over 150 family memberships currently," he said.

While enrollment and membership numbers increase, the facilities to house all of the program's participants in cases of inclement weather just are not there.

"We have been very lucky that we haven't had a negative weather event, where you have to, all of a sudden, house a whole bunch of children very quickly and get them out of bad weather," Mr. Calnan explained. "Basically, if there is one thing that this sailing center is for, it is to be able to provide a safe haven for all of our young sailors when the weather gets rough.

"We also want to be able to use the space," he added. "If the children can't be out on the water sailing, we could teach them various aspects of sailing, like repairing boats and working with sails, in a nice, controlled environment.

"We are not trying to build a fancy club here," Mr. Calnan continued. "We are just trying to make sure that, if the children need a shelter, we have it for them. This is a community resource for everybody."

Those interested in donating to the FOBH's capital campaign can either look for their advertisements in local newspapers, which will contain pledge cards which can be clipped out and mailed to P. O. Box 454, Belmar 07719 or visit the FOBH Web site at [www.fobhnj.org](http://www.fobhnj.org), where the pledge cards are available to be downloaded and then mailed to the above address.

Pledge cards can also be picked up at the FOBH trailer, which is located next to the BAC's BoatWorks, on River Road, in Belmar.

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