

Belmar to build sailing center

By Kelly Skellinger

BELMAR — The Friends of the Belmar Harbor [FOBH] and the borough of Belmar are partnering up to launch a \$1 million capital campaign to build a multi-faceted, one-of-a-kind community 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.

The borough's existing sailing center now just functions as a "comfort station," Michael Mixson, executive director of the FOBH, explained. The existing sailing center currently includes restrooms and a storage area for lifeguard equipment and the borough's sailing equipment.

The proposed community sailing center is projected to be 50-feet wide by 140-feet long. The building will be two stories high and cost an estimated \$1.8 million.

The community sailing center will 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 non-profit groups, to teach sailing safety.

"The most unique part of what we are doing is we are trying to build the only community partnership sailing center in New Jersey, which will house the multi-faceted types of events and activities that we are projecting," Mr. Mixson said.

"We will wind up having built something that will make the Belmar waterfront really something," Mr. Mixson said. "A destination for people to come, learn about sailing and learn about the Shark River Bay environment."

The community sailing center will support the educational and philanthropic activities of the FOBH, which teaches sailing and the relationship of people to the environment of the Shark River Bay.

David Calnan, president of the FOBH, Gary Jobson, the campaign's honorary chairman and a world renowned America's Cup Sailor, Mr. Mixson and Councilman Matthew Doherty, the council liaison to the borough's Harbor Commission, convened yesterday in MacClearie Park, at the corner of State Highway 35 and the "L" Street Beach, in the borough, to publicly announce the launch of the project.

"Over the past few months we have been notified by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program and the New Jersey Department of Transportation Office of Maritime Resources I BOAT NJ Program of matching grant awards for the project of approximately \$800,000, leaving us with a balance to be raised of \$1 million dollars," Mr. Mixson stated at Wednesday's public launch of the project.

"With the help of generous individuals, foundations, corporations and others, we are confident that we will meet and, we hope, exceed this goal by July 11, 2008," Mr. Mixson continued yesterday.

"Having a community sailing center here in Belmar is an asset to the residents of Belmar and all the surrounding communities, and communities throughout our state," Councilman Doherty stated, "and the fact that it will be constructed with grant monies from state agencies and fund-raising by the FOBH is amazing."

"Mike Mixson really deserves the credit for this — his vision and perseverance makes this a possibility," Councilman Doherty added.

"We [the FOBH] have been growing for eight years," Mr. Mixson stated. "We have gone from having 30, 40 kids to, this summer, we will touch the lives of over 400 children."

"We have high school programs for Neptune, St. Rose and Wall, in concert with their recreation program, a low-cost summer instructional camp program, a free scholarship program, and two inner city children's sailing programs for kids in Newark and Asbury Park," Mr. Mixson continued.

"Two years ago, we began to plan building the actual structure, which would house the community sailing program in partnership with the borough of Belmar," Mr. Mixson said. "The borough and public works provided us with access to the water in MacClearie Park, the docks and the on-land boat yard. Mayor [Kenneth] Pringle has been supporting us since the very beginning. He is really, solidly behind our program."

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