

SPORTS

Bainbridge Island Rowing center project approaching finish line

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BAINBRIDGE ISLAND — The finish line is approaching for Bainbridge Island Rowing's new home at Waterfront Park.

The Stan Pocock Legacy Rowing Center, named after the Seattle rowing legend, is expected to fully open once interior work on the upper portion of the two-story, 15,000-square-foot facility is complete. The second floor of the building, which will be available for community rental purposes, features a large open space, locker rooms, meeting rooms, offices and a kitchen space.

"The plan is to have it done by mid-fall," said Sue Entress, the club's communications chair and coach for the novice girls team.

Bainbridge Island Rowing previously used fenced-off tennis courts at Waterfront Park as a rudimentary storage facility. Design work for the new rowing center began in 2015 and construction began the following year on the first floor, which currently houses the club's fleet of 30-35 boats.

The club initially hoped the \$3.4 million project would be finished in early 2021, but the COVID-19 pandemic slowed construction and fund-raising efforts.

Entress, who served as board president in 2020 when the pandemic began to fully emerge, remembers holding an emergency meeting to discuss pausing activities.

"We thought we'd be closed for two weeks," she said.

The shutdown lasted much longer. Even when the club resumed activity, participants were required to wear masks and use single-shell (one-person) boats instead of larger capacity crew boats.

"We borrowed as many single boats as we could from whoever owned them on the island," Entress said. "We had pods of six kids going out in six single boats, distanced apart."

Safety restrictions began to subside in the fall of 2021, but even this spring, club operations haven't completely returned to normal. Bainbridge Island Rowing's racing schedule, which is typically mapped out months in advance and includes competitions for the club's juniors and masters programs, is missing some traditional stops, including the Covered Bridge Regatta in Oregon and the Brentwood International Regatta in Canada.

The club hosted its first event — the Salt Watta Regatta — on March 27 on Eagle Harbor. Bainbridge's junior team of 100 participants competed in 1,500-meter time trials and 1,000-meter races against athletes from Clam Island, Vashon Island Rowing Club and Olympia Area Rowing. Entress said the junior team typically consists of students in grades 9-12, but the club added 10-15 eighth-graders this year as a way to get younger students active during the pandemic. The club is planning to form a separate eighth-grade program next season.

Despite a truncated regular season schedule, bigger events loom on the horizon. The annual Windermere Cup on Lake Washington is scheduled for May 7. The USRowing Northwest Youth Championships run May 20-22 on Vancouver Lake and serve as a qualifier for the USRowing National Championships on June 9-12 in Sarasota-Bradenton, Florida.

Club honors late rower

On April 8, Bainbridge Island Rowing members gathered at Waterfront Park to memorialize former rower Ian Becke of Poulsbo. Becke died March 25 at the age of 74 after a fight against glioblastoma. The club christened a newly-named Ian Becke skiff, which was donated by Rob Smallwood of Smallwood Design and Construction on Bainbridge Island.