

UCLA Marina Aquatic Center developing innovative programs and equipment for physically challenged

BY PAT REYNOLDS

The UCLA Marina Aquatic Center at the end of Fiji Way in Marina del Rey quietly offers the community an opportunity to learn and participate in a host of marine-related activities such as sailing, kayaking, rowing, surfing and windsurfing for next to nothing, but it is also developing innovative programs and equipment that are changing the lives of physically-challenged people.

Flying below the radar, UCLA is developing or building never-before-seen adaptive equipment that enables people with physical limitations an opportunity to participate in recreational activities that were impossible before.

Through this innovative new program, disabled outdoorsmen and outdoorswomen can enjoy a myriad of water sports as they've never done before.

It's a new pilot program spearheaded and forged by aquatic coordinator and recreational therapist Jamie Hoffman, who has worked with disabled athletes and adaptive equipment in the past.

The UCLA Marina Aquatic Center had never had a program like this before, but Hoffman says she was driven to implement one even if she had to build the equipment herself on a shoestring budget.

UCLA gave her the green light to begin and she immediately got the ball rolling on an adaptive kayak program.



UCLA MARINA AQUATIC CENTER participant Adam Wilson (right) and his friend Christina paddle a kayak in a program designed for people with physical limitations. (Photo by Pat Reynolds)



was a neat thing to have people with so many different abilities out on the water with their families kayaking. It was a great day."

While Hoffman is indeed delighted that the UCLA Marina Aquatic Center has given her the green light on going forward with the project, she by no means is satisfied with just the kayak development. Her plan is to ex-

SCORE (Spinal Cord Opportunities for Rehabilitation and Education) they will be able to turn the program into an ongoing class with a curriculum by this summer or fall.

"Professionally, it has been my dream to develop an adaptive recreation program," said Hoffman. "And now I have the opportunity at UCLA to do so."

"I bought a bunch of wood and some PVC piping — then with the help of a friend of mine, Mark Theobold, who created the concepts, I made the adaptive equipment.

"It enables people that don't have the upper body strength or the necessary mobility to hold the paddle at the proper angle



JANE SHESTOV paddles a kayak with her feet in UCLA Marina Aquatic Center's pilot program. (Photo by Pat Reynolds)

and paddle independently."

The equipment ingeniously eliminates the weight of the paddle by fixing it to a bar that provides a pivot point allowing the act of paddling to be possible without having to hold and swing it back and forth. It facilitates powering the kayak with feet or one hand and it also provides a way to paddle for those without the ability to grip.

Reducing the physicality involved and situating the paddle on the pivot point enables those who could never before have the experience of exploring in a kayak to do so now.

"The most important part for us is to develop functional independence for people to kayak, but also to facilitate the act of participating with their families and friends in an inclusive environment," Hoffman says.

The pieces of equipment the program utilizes conceived by engineer Theobold are not currently on the market or manufactured by any company, but rather the designs are on his Web site, disabledadventurers.com, free for the taking.

"I invite you to make free use of the material presented in this

site," states Theobold generously on the site, "in particular to reproduce, with or without your own modifications, any of the fixtures and adaptations presented here for your own use.

"All I ask is for you to share pictures and stories of your success with me as you proceed."

He adds, "Please note, also, that I have purposefully published all my designs in the public domain for more than a year so that no one may patent these ideas and preclude anyone else from building and marketing them. My intent is to make them as widely and freely available as possible."

Because of Theobold's altruism and a grant from the California Department of Boating and Waterways, disabled kayakers recently paddled in the waters of, Marina del Rey unassisted on the inaugural day with the new equipment.

"It was really amazing," Hoffman said. "On the first day, we had a few participants — one with a spinal cord injury and one with MS [multiple sclerosis].

"And on the second day there was a wide scope of people with a variety of different abilities. It

pand the adaptive program and include a variety of activities and sports. Hand cycling, surfing, rowing and sailing are all in the works.

The upcoming goals for Hoffman and the program are to pursue more funding in order to purchase equipment and provide scholarship money for potential participants.

The center recently received a grant from the Christopher Reeve Foundation, which bought them a hand cycle, but they're hoping that through the public's awareness and a partnership with

She adds, "I knew one day I was going to be in a position where I would be able to develop my own program, because it's what I love and want to do, and now it's finally happening."

There are four more paddling dates set for the spring — Sunday, April 22nd; Sunday, May 6th; Thursday, May 24th; and Sunday, June 10th.

For information or to sign up for one of these dates, contact Hoffman at jhoffman@recreation.ucla.edu, call the UCLA Aquatic Center at (310) 823-0048 or visit <http://marinaaquaticcenter.org/>

boating calendar

Thurs., Feb 15

RADIO PROCEDURES — Boater's World presents a VHF radio procedures seminar discusses which frequencies to hail on and which to avoid; when to make a pan call, a security alert or a mayday; and VHF procedures and DSC capabilities of VHF radios. 6 p.m., at the store, 4160 Lincoln Blvd., between Maxella Avenue and Washington Boulevard, Marina del Rey area. (310) 306-0567.

Thurs., Feb 22

ANCHORING — Boater's World presents its annual anchoring seminar, which will consider the proper scope to use, where to single anchor, where to anchor bow and stern and how to use a tripping line. 6 p.m., at the store, 4160 Lincoln Blvd., between Maxella Avenue and Washington Boulevard, Marina del Rey area. (310) 306-0567.

Fri., March 2

DAN BYRNE SERIES — Dan Byrne Series consists of five races sailed around the Channel Islands of Santa Barbara and Santa Catalina as well as Bishop Rock on Cortez Bank. The second in the series is the Bishop Rock to Catalina West End race. Sponsored by the Marina del Rey-based Pacific Singlehanded Sailing Association. Information and race packet, www.pssala.org

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