

# At The **CATCH**

## Anchorage Rowing Association Mid-Season Newsletter Aug 2020

At the beginning of our season it was important for us to focus our efforts in crafting our C-19 Response plan (p.2) and this resulted in the newsletter being pushed back. As the season rows on though, we still see the newsletter as a value to all our members, both past and present. It is a way to stay connected by sharing some of the profiles and highlights so far this summer.

### Not the year we had planned

Few people alive today have experienced anything that can rival the scope of what we are all experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems like a long time ago that we probably all found ourselves washing our hands to the 20-second song of choice thinking *"This isn't gonna last."* Just trying to keep up with what is currently open, what local mandates or recommendations are in place, if and how groups of people should congregate, and what safety measures should be used is overwhelming and the cause of much mental fatigue. Each day, we must ask ourselves questions such as *"Is it safe for the kids*

*to visit Grandma?"* or *"Could I go to the gym if only a few people are there?"* As rowers, we found ourselves asking whether we can or should row at all.

If we measure this time period by the numbers, death tolls, political divisiveness or protests, we risk losing our optimism in a sea of depressing news. Instead, we want to recognize at least some of the good things that have been accomplished. Maybe your lawn looks outstanding, you planted a new garden, repainted your house, or went backpacking for the first time. We hope at the top of your list is a new skill level in rowing a single! With the guidance of Coach Steve, most folks

who have been able to row this summer have vastly improved their sculling skills and have thoroughly enjoyed on-water experiences. *We even have a group of novice scullers who started this summer!*

So, if you decided not to row this summer, we totally understand. Even though you've missed out on something special this year, it doesn't come close to how much we miss seeing all of the members of our ARA rowing family.

Stay healthy, be safe and remember we're all in the same boat . . . *even if we all can't be in the same boat for a while!*

### A Coaching Journey By Steve Full

What do you want to be when you grow up? A professional baseball player, basketball player, doctor, lawyer, teacher, firefighter would cross my mind. No one focus or particular direction, but interests and passions that I had at that particular time. As I grew and explored some of those passions I really took to golf, training and competing at the junior level, even winning a couple of tournaments. This led to my first "realistic" answer: **golf course management.**

I loved golf; being on the course, smelling the grass, and how pretty the green was in contrast to the blue skies and trees. I worked as a groundskeeper for a few summers soaking in all that could about maintenance, upkeep and design, figuring out why things were done a certain way and getting to see the outcome of my work. There was something very satisfying about getting dirty and making something beautiful. So, a golf course designer

or landscape architect was my path, right? Like most journeys, there are no straight lines. It was during this time I had my first coaching experience -- in a somewhat accidental way. As my passion for golf and golf courses developed, I wanted to share that vision with my dad. So like any good 11-year old I wanted to golf with my dad . . . problem was, my dad, did not know how to golf. We had my left-handed clubs and we had



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## Rowing in 2020

In the uncharted waters of this pandemic, we have the ARA Board of Directors to thank for crafting a Covid 19 Response that's made the 2020 season a safe and valued experience for all club members. The plan was reviewed by the Anchorage Municipality and because of the way our members have committed to following it's guidance, it has been successful... *so far*.

Increased activity in the park, at the dock, and on the water have been challenging at times, but we hope you'll continue to be kind and helpful to all who are enjoying this beautiful resource that is Sand Lake.

**Click To read our Covid 19 Response 2020**

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

The Anchorage Rowing Association is committed to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in Alaska rowing. Our mission is to enrich the lives of our members and the community through the sport of rowing, and we strive to include all individuals who want to row, regardless of age (12-99), gender, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or ability. We aim to foster a culture of unity, inclusion, and camaraderie at ARA, while instilling in our members the importance of fitness at any age.



Our former ARA coach, Denise Aquino, has created an excellent podcast on rowing and diversity and it's a great way to begin creating better awareness: <https://linktr.ee/RowingInColor>



Podcast



**Black Rowers and Coaches Roundtable**  
Sponsored by Rowing in Color

## Weigh Enough Ball



### END OF SEASON PARTY

**Oct 10**  
**6-9pm**

Maybe you rowed this year, maybe you took this summer off, maybe you're not in Alaska... no matter how many strokes you took you can still join us. Don't miss out because virtually everyone is welcome. *Keep an eye out for more details.*

## Picture Perfect Rowing

The Moose Nugget adapts to the new normal



What would a season be without the Moose Nugget, or this new Covid 19 version, the Moose *Nuggette* Regatta, right here at home on Sand Lake. Thanks goes to Janet Curran, Anne Blount and Elisa Samuelson for organizing this great event. And we can't forget all the volunteers who stepped up to make this a reality. Thank you.

Click the race photos for that races video on Facebook. For all the videos of the Moose Nuggette races click the MNR woodal.



## Junior Camp Had A Healthy Turnout

If you thought COVID-19 would put a damper on rowing, you have not seen ARA's junior rowers. Although our Junior Camp learn to row was capped at 12 due to the restriction of only being able to row singles and doubles, we have retained 8 of these rowers and that percentage is fantastic!

Currently, we have 3 levels of junior rowers. There are of

course our newest novice juniors who are fast learners and by the end of camp were rowing in singles and doubles with confidence. *Thank you Coach Steve!!* We have returning juniors making our 2nd level and lastly our college age rowers, or U23. It has been said that a healthy rowing club has a strong junior program, so you do the math!



Mason Miller



Drake McGinley



Nicholas Bittner

## The Journey continues

one older, wooden faced right-handed driver. My dad is right-handed. Setting up in the front yard, I showed him how to overlap your fingers on the club, how to roll his wrists when striking the ball, and what the hips do to create power. Then I teed up a ball and set his feet pointing down the street towards the house at the end of the block, about 250 yards away from the edge of our driveway. Like my experience, I expected my dad to really duff the ground or completely miss the ball on his first swing. NOPE. Pure connection. A straight shot blasted out of our front yard, one-hopped the pavement and landed 240 yards away in our neighbors yard... My dad was stoked! I was shocked, then stoked, then excited for him thinking my dad must be a natural!! We tried again, and the more typical result happened, a complete whiff. But my dad was hooked on getting the same shot again and I was hooked on teaching him how to do it. I didn't know it then, but this was probably the first time I ever used my own voice. It was empowering, but I did not think of myself as a coach. Just a kid excited to see his dad take part in something I loved.

All throughout middle school, high school and college, I felt I had excellent mentors in my teachers and coaches, giving me great nuggets of information on how to accomplish team goals. My senior year of college our boat was struggling to find rhythm and fluidity together. We needed to latch on to something that we all understood. Our rowing coaches at the University of Washington, Mike Callahan and Luke McGee, would hold separate practice sessions outside of our normal practice time, trying to figure it out.

For some reason, we couldn't click as a group. I remember talking with Mike briefly after practice about how we needed to accelerate, and he loved it, calling the guys out of the locker room for me to explain it. We ended up winning a National Championship that year. I'm not saying, it's what I said or did, but I also knew my actions had a positive impact on our crew and made the rest of our racing experiences go in the right direction. Still, I hadn't thought about rowing as a career. I wanted to get a master's degree in the new Athletic Leadership School at UW.

That summer while I was studying for the GRE and trying to find work, I applied for a coaching job at one of the programs in Seattle. When I showed up for the interview, Conal Groom put me straight into a launch and I was told to coach the varsity juniors for 30-40 min. This is when I became a coach. I knew I wanted to be on the water; I knew I wanted to share the knowledge that I had. I was hooked on seeing the improvements in each individual, excited for them when they performed well, and happy to know I was making a positive change in a person.

That first year of coaching was insane. I think I coached one year at Lake Union and aged five in the process. I coached three different master's programs, two learn to rows, and one Junior practice every day, plus I assisted with the elite sculling group. It

was a great experience, but at the time I wanted more than just a club coaching job. I wanted to coach collegiately, become a head coach at the D1 level, to win conference championships, and work on the National or Olympic Teams. Some of those dreams were realized and others not, but my pursuit of excellence, emphasis on speed



**Cinderella story, out of nowhere, former greenskeeper, now has become the Masters coach.**

and winning had deviated from its empowering origins that my very first experience had given me. The joy of seeing people take a good stroke, the moment it clicked in their bodies, the sensation of weightlessness, unified with power and connected with subtle grace. Maybe I burned myself out mentally from constantly pushing others to win, that I forgot how much fun and passion could be had from something so simple. I have the sense that I did. These last few months have been about getting back to basics and unearthing that same level of excitement, enthusiasm and empowerment that I had as that 11-year-old kid teaching something I love. Whatever the reason is, I am glad my journey took me where it has

and has helped me realize how much passion I have for giving the gift of rowing to others, and for that, I thank you.

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# So much more than arms only

## Profile of Jayne Fortson M.D.

Wimpy and weak are two words that will never be used to describe ARA's first adaptive rower, Dr. Jayne Fortson. Jayne was introduced to rowing when her children took up the sport in high school and college. Five years ago she discovered ARA from a piece on Alaska Public Radio about the Dave, and began a journey to become the first member with a severe disability. She started out in the Alden 18 double with Ed and progressed to the Loon with pontoons from someone's garage and a special seat to keep her supported and secure in the boat. Last summer in an arms-only pickup race against a quad, Jayne won.

A synchronized swimmer and athlete in high school and college, Jayne was buried for more than an hour in a rock/ice fall while spelunking at age 19. She was hospitalized for 6 months with severe injuries, including being on a ventilator. She credits her survival in part to her superb lung capacity from synchronized swimming. Among her injuries was a broken back which left her paralyzed from the chest down. Jayne finally was able to return to college at the University at Albany in Albany, NY where her friend, a competitive swimmer (later ironically a world class rower) Sherry Cassuto, trained her for competitive swimming and introduced her to wheelchair sports.

Since her dream to become a marine biologist was no longer a reality, Jayne enrolled in medical school in Chicago in 1981. There she began racing in wheelchair marathons. During her first marathon, she had a flat tire, finishing the race long after everyone but her coach had gone home. This inspired her to enter another race in Arizona;

her race time there brought her to the attention of the national wheelchair cycling community and many invitations to race. She won the Honolulu Marathon in 1981 and Chicago Marathon in 1985. She also took up archery and continued swimming. She had to retire from wheelchair racing due to ongoing challenges from her injury, so she took up hand cycling and was able to compete in the Skinny Raven Half-marathon with the help of ARA's Robin Phillips, who acted as her support person.

During her internal medicine residency in Salt Lake City, Jayne met her future husband. Their honeymoon was a 10 day kayaking/camping trip in Glacier Bay with no communication with the outside world after a float plane dropped them off. She became hooked on Alaska, and relocated to Anchorage in 1990, where she opened her Dermatology practice. Jayne considers herself to be "the luckiest person in the world" for having three great children and a wonderful life.

Jayne tries to focus on what she can do and concentrates on being positive and doing "the best I can each and every day at work and in life." She strives "to be strong, fit, and directed." Rowing has been powerful for her, and she feels completely integrated, for the first time as an adult, in

a non-disabled community. Ed and Coach Rich were extremely helpful in her learning to row.

Jayne would like to thank the ARA for welcoming her and also to thank everyone for all the assistance members have provided so that she can row - "I feel as if I'm not pulling my weight as a team member." She so appreciates all those who carry her boat, help her in and out of the boat, up and down the hill, and all the other things that need to happen to get her onto the water.



Last summer in an arms-only pickup race against a quad, Jayne won.

