



Fellowship of the Wind

By Maria Ferri • Photos by Desiree Moyer

When Kay Slater decided to learn how to windsurf, she went looking for a female instructor to teach her how. While she didn't set out to topple any gender barriers, women from across the Cape now enjoy the largely male-dominated world of water sports as a result.

For Brewster resident Desiree Moyer, windsurfing has become an addiction. She can't get enough of it.

And she's not alone. On a warm Sunday afternoon in September, Moyer joins a crowd that is gathering at the far end of West Dennis Beach. A few fluorescent colored sails skim across the surface of Nantucket Sound, propelled by a steady crosswind, and standing all around me are women in wetsuits.

The women call themselves the Cape Cod Wahines, a name borrowed from the Hawaiian word for female surfer.

The mission of the group is to encourage women of all ages to participate in wind, wave and kite surfing, and on this particular day they have convened for a windsurfing weekend.

"There were only six of us the first year," says Kay Slater, one of the group's founding members. "I figured that it might be difficult to learn windsurfing from my husband, so when I found out about Petra Kanz I asked a few of my friends to take a lesson with me." As the word spread about windsurfing workshops specifically designed for women,

it quickly became clear that Slater and her friends weren't the only Cape women who yearned to be out on the water.

Petra Kanz, a certified instructor based out of New Jersey, has taught surfing, windsurfing, and kite surfing up and down the East Coast. She claims that if you're a woman interested in water sports, Cape Cod is the place to be. "The Cape is definitely the hot spot on the East Coast," says Kanz. "It's definitely the fastest growing area for women." In just two years time the Wahines have expanded to include nearly 70 members and now host multiple instructional "Wahine Weekends" throughout the year.

"I teach them to be safe and self-sufficient," explains Kanz. Beginner Wahines learn how to load the equipment and rig up their gear themselves. They also learn how to watch the ocean and read the weather. I step aside to allow a woman to pass by carrying a massive sail under her arm. "One of the first things you learn is how to carry your equipment properly," Slater tells me.

Everyone from students and small business owners to doctors, teachers and even lieutenant governor hopeful Andrea Silbert (see page 20) are proud to be called Wahines. "I find the women who come to the Cape workshops to be very self-motivated, self-sufficient, and self-empowered," says Kanz.

"I'm out on the water from April to December as often as the wind blows," says Moyer, another of the Wahine co-chairs. Moyer, who came to the group already knowing how to windsurf, appreciates not only the opportunity to pick up tips from an expert, but also the supportive network of like-minded friends that the Wahines provide. "If any of us are planning to go out we

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always make a post on our website to let the others know," says Moyer.

The Wahines seek to break through the unseen barriers and fears that prevent women from trying the sports. Much like a sisterhood, the women have a close sense of camaraderie. There is always someone available to help a new member find equipment or recommend a great babysitter to a stay-at-home mom.

With jobs and families, it can be a challenge to find the time to get out on the water, and for some women there are also subconscious barriers such as confidence issues or fear of embarrassment. "These are gear-intensive sports," says Moyer, "so that can be a bit intimidating. Because it requires a fair amount of practice time on the water, childcare can also be a big thing." Women shouldn't be overwhelmed, however. An increased interest in women's water sports has also been growing on a national level and gear manufacturers are now developing lines of "diva" gear made lighter and with smaller hand grips to better fit women's bodies.

For many women, just the feeling of being out on the water is enough to keep them coming back. "It gives you a chance to reconnect with nature and gives you a sense of empowerment," says Kanz.

"It's not that the guys weren't welcoming," says Slater. "It's just that women have a different style. They tend to check in with each other more often."

This past summer, with a little support from her friends, Slater decided to give another sport a try – surfing. "They stayed right by my side and taught me how to pop up and how to read the waves," she says. She now enjoys trips to the outer beach to hang ten. ❖