

Wind in her sails

By Lisa Christopher
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Skipper wins coveted award and is featured in Sports Illustrated.

Six-year-old Carol Park didn't know it then, but, back in the 1960s, when her father, Bill, uprooted the family from their home in State College to pursue his doctorate at Cornell University, a lifelong hobby was about to be born.

The home where the Park family was staying overlooked Cayuga Lake where people sailed boats for recreation. The elder Park was charmed by the graceful hulls slipping through the water while brilliant sails billowed in the wind.

"He thought it was neat, something to try," says Carol Park, now a 44-year-old York County resident. "Dad bought a book and taught himself how to sail and then he taught the rest of us. That's how it started."

A lifelong sailor, Park's pursuits have paid off. This year she became the first female skipper to win the Susquehanna Yacht Club's coveted Frey Trophy, named for former club member Gene Frey who died in 1973. She's also about to land in an upcoming Faces in the Crowd, a regular feature in Sports Illustrated.

Park's pragmatic outlook on life makes it inevitable that she'd downplay her nod from a national magazine as well as the award she earned at SYC and other trophies over the years in sailing regattas around the country. She realizes that in the game of life, you win some and lose some.

"Still, it's staggering to think what a landlocked sailor can do," she says, referring to her upbringing in central Pennsylvania.

Park lives in Wrightsville and works as an independent consulting industrial engineer under the business name CP Projects Inc. Her clients have included convenience store chain Wawa Inc., Harley Davidson and Proctor & Gamble.

Park owns a 13-foot Sunfish sail boat that she takes to Florida regattas every other year to compete. But when she sails the Susquehanna, it's on a 19-foot Lightning class sailboat owned by Leola residents Bill and Linda Remerenko who also crew for Park.

"She's extremely competitive," Bill Remerenko says of Park. "And we're an extremely good crew. She's the skipper and we do what she says -- even when she's wrong."

All joking aside, Remerenko, who's been crewing for three years with Park at the helm, says sailing is like breathing to her.

"She just has a great and natural feel for what needs to be done. It's just second nature to her."

Park got the bulk of her sailing experience on the inland lakes of Pennsylvania. (After her father finished his Ph.d work, they moved back to State College.)

"As a teen-ager, there was Lake Glendale, north of Altoona, with a very active sailing club that had a lot of families for members," she says. "So, it was a fun weekend thing to do during the summer."

Inland lakes, Park says, are well-suited for a beginning sailor learning the ropes.

"The wind can shift quickly so you have to learn how to adjust your sails. It's a really good training ground."

Park's formative years in sailing and competing were spent with her twin sister, Mary Keppel, who now lives in Philadelphia. She says she and her sister developed a relationship off and on the water. They took yoga to learn relaxation techniques that helped them stay calm in high-level competition.

"We learned teamwork," says Park. "We talked about racing and maneuvers off the water so that when we were on the water we could focus. The mental game is the one to be in control of. Your boat handling becomes flawless when you are in control mentally."

Park was on Penn State's sailing team and competed in the Inter-Collegiate Yacht Racing Association national from 1976-1980. She won the association's Collegiate Women's Nationals in 1979.

Park also represented the United States in Denmark at the Women's World Invitational regatta in 1978 and was four-time National Champion in the Sidewinder Association's regatta during the 1970s.

Though she'll be in Sports Illustrated's Faces in the Crowd feature, it isn't her first appearance. She also was featured in 1977.

Aside from competition, Park enjoys sailing for the relaxation and the enjoyment of being on the water and near nature.

"Sometimes it's great to push away from the dock with no intention of racing at all," she says.

Park also likes sailing because much of it translates into life lessons.

"The importance of teamwork comes through as well as having a plan and staying calm as you pursue and implement that plan," she says. "Sailing teaches you to shift when you need to, collect data, change whatever you need to change and just keep going."