

Blowing in the wind

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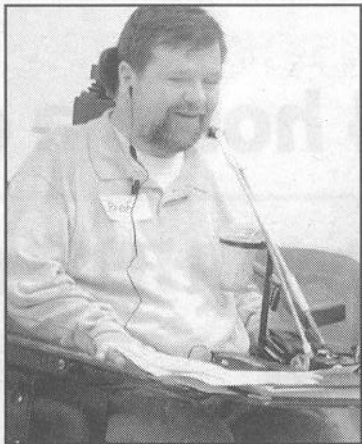
Dawson displays sip-and-puff sailing

By Dan Delmar

When René Dallaire suffered a severe spinal cord injury in a skiing accident and lost the use of his limbs, sailing solo in international competitions was the furthest thing from his mind.

Thirty-three years later, Dallaire is now reaching out to other disabled individuals through L'Association Québécoise de Voile Adaptée, an organization he founded in 1995.

Dallaire was one of the province's best downhill skiers and gunning for the national championships when he had the accident. Determined to stay active and pursue his career, Dallaire obtained a bachelors degree in business administration and found full-time work as a chartered accountant. He even returned to the sport that changed his life so drastically, but felt assisted skiing was hardly a challenge. He finally found his passion in sailing, and practices the



Dallaire: first-time sailors skeptical.

sport as often as possible.

"At first, people tend to be a bit scared, especially if the winds are strong," Dallaire said. "You can see the question marks in their faces, but the more you talk about [the boat and its various safety features], the more they become interested."

Dallaire is able to guide his boat, the Martin 16, using "sip and puff" technology, where he

blows into a tube and directs the steering wheel with his breathing.

"I control the boat almost as easily as [any able-bodied sailor] does," he said. Dallaire earned his first win at last year's San Diego Turbo Regatta, and hopes to impress at this summer's Mobility Cup in Ottawa.

Dallaire's AQVA, based at the Pointe Claire Yacht Club, along with the Dawson College services for students with disabilities, set up the boats in the school's cafeteria in a special clinic at the Saturday where prospective sailors viewed the boats and attended informal seminars. Future volunteers, including councillors from Camp Massawippi in the Eastern Townships, were also shown how assist the sailors in the whole process.

D'Arcy O'Connor, an executive member of the AQVA and English professor at Dawson, helped organize the event.

"Sailing is not that hard,"



O'Connor shows volunteers how to operate the Access Dinghy.

O'Connor said. "It's 3/4 brain-power and 1/4 physical brawn." O'Connor added that he believes many disabled individuals will gain a sense of independence, and maybe even "sail circles around

able-bodied sailors."

"It makes a hell of a difference in their lives," said Dallaire. They are no longer "spectators in the sport, they are active participants with all the benefits."

MARTIN CHAMBERLAND PHOTOS