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The West Island Chronicle > My neighborhood

Smooth sailing

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An afternoon of sailing can sound like fun, but not if you're bound to a wheelchair – then, it could get quite complicated.



© (TC Media photo - Leslie Schachter)
President of the AQVA, René Dallaire and Senneville Mayor Jane Guest, enjoying an evening of smooth sailing.

The Quebec Association for Adapted Sailing (AQVA) is trying to change just that, as it welcomed municipal dignitaries and the disabled community in the West Island to an awareness-raising activity at the Pointe Claire Yacht Club last week.

It was important for the executive director of the organization, René Dallaire, for the mayors to grasp what he – and hundreds of others – experience daily.

Morris Trudeau, Michel Gibson, and Jane Guest, mayors of Pointe Claire, Kirkland and Senneville, respectively, attended the event – much to the delight of Dallaire.

"It was a magical moment," said Dallaire.

The experience was also a first for Guest, who not only learned to sail, but meet a unique community.

"I wanted to meet the people. They're unique," she said.

This group of disabled persons, to which the Senneville mayor is referring, have been able to achieve a level freedom previously unfathomable, thanks to Dallaire.

A quadriplegic at the age of 19 following a skiing activity, the very athletic Dallaire was wheelchair-stricken.

In 1994, he discovered that sailing could, once again, be possible. It gave him the idea of getting involved in the AQVA, at the Montreal chapter operating out of the Pointe Claire Yacht Club since 1996, and getting as many people as possible to taste the sweetness of freedom yet again.

Even if it is only for an hour and a half, the time spent is priceless – or worth the \$15 spent.

"That feeling is so great. And it's more than that. It's a feeling of confidence," said Dallaire. He found another way to stay active – other than just watching sports on television.

"It is so impressive to see people that are handicapped in some way overcome the disability," Guest said. The evening made her reflect about life in general and the fact that "we sometimes take our good health for granted."