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Sailors to converge on Lac St. Louis for adapted sailing regatta this week



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Nearly 30 physically-disabled persons will reclaim a sense of freedom this weekend (July 24-26) when they sail Lac St. Louis in their adapted dinghies and keelboats in the upcoming Coupe du Quebec, held at the Pointe Claire Yacht Club.



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A quadriplegic since the age of 19, Rene Dallaire has been actively involved in the sport of adapted sailing since 1994.

The Association Quebecoise de Voile Adaptee, with the help of the Pointe Claire-based yacht club (1 Cartier Ave.), is hosting the 15th edition of the sailing regatta – considered the largest in Eastern Canada and welcoming athletes from places afar like Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Northeastern United States.

Some athletes will even come from the West Island, which makes up about 23 per cent of the membership at the AQVA's Montreal chapter.

“These people love sailing. They will make sure to be here for this,” Rene Dallaire, the executive director of the Montreal chapter which is based at the Pointe Claire Yacht Club, told the Chronicle.

Dallaire, who was once a winter sports enthusiast before an alpine skiing accident turned him into a quadriplegic at the age of 19, will be sailing in the regatta to regain a sense of freedom.

“It’s a wonderful feeling. You would never think it could be so rewarding. You would never think that a person like me, who doesn’t use his arms and legs, could practice this sport,” he said.

What allows Dallaire to sail Lac St. Louis over three times a week is a dinghy built with a sophisticated straw system called the “sip n’ puff.” Instead of controlling the helm and sails with hands, the sailor uses his breath.

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By just inhaling or exhaling gently into the straw, the rudder moves left or right and the sails can be let out or drawn in. A qualified instructor, however, must always accompany the sailor safety reasons.

For sailors who do have the use of their hands, the boats are equipped with what is called an autohelm, a centrally-located joystick, similar to that of a video game controller.

There are a total of 11 adapted dinghies or keelboats at the yacht club, six of which owned by the AQVA. The adapt sail boats are very expensive, beginning at \$25,000.

With memberships costs low, 80 per cent of the AQVA budget is dependent on the generosity of companies and individuals.

Schedule of activities:

Friday July 24

3:00 – 9 p.m.: Registration, launch of boats

Saturday July 25

10 a.m.: First race for the Gold Fleet

2 p.m.: First race for the Silver Fleet

Sunday July 26

9:30 a.m.: First race for the Silver Fleet

TBD: First race for the Gold Fleet

TBD: Prize-giving and awards

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