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**Betty Magnusson Named First Woman  
Commodore Of Monomoy Yacht Club**

**by Elizabeth Van Wye**

Since its inception in 1937, Chatham's Monomoy Yacht Club has had two dozen commodores, all men. Chatham resident Betty Magnusson, elected in early September, is commodore number 25 and the first woman to hold the club's highest rank.

In choosing Magnusson, the club selected a long-time Chatham resident with decades of experience on the water, and a love for boating that goes back to her childhood.



*Chatham resident Betty Magnusson, the first female commodore of the Monomoy Yacht Club. ELIZABETH VAN WYE PHOTO*

Although Magnusson grew up in the St. Louis area surrounded by the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, her family never had boats and never had any interest in boating, she says.

"My first boating experience came when I was in college, when I took canoeing as one of my physical education courses," she recalled. "I loved canoeing. I learned how to empty a canoe, and what to do when you get in trouble," she remembers. Shortly afterwards, Magnusson graduated from William Woods College and then Washington University School of Medical Technology and became a registered medical technologist.

Marriage to Leonard Magnusson, a high school friend and newly minted chemical engineer, followed in 1951 and so did more boating. "We honeymooned in Muskoga Lakes north of Toronto," she says, and they rented a canoe and started out their married life paddling together.

They soon moved to Tennessee, where they both signed up for a Power Squadron Boating Safety course. After successfully completing the course, Betty discovered that Len had earned a certificate, but she did not. "They didn't give them to women then," she says. "I didn't like that...but it was a while ago," she says ruefully.

It was while living in Cincinnati in the '60s that Betty and Len first rented a sailboat. "We got a small boat called a Sunfish and wound up taking the kids (there were three of them by now) for rides. If you can sail a Sunfish, you can sail anything" they learned, and were thereafter bitten by the sailing bug.

Betty's parents, Bessie and Frank Brewin, had moved to Chatham in the '50s and owned and operated the Ben Franklin store. Betty and Len and their growing family came often to visit. She recalls renting a Beetle Cat at Stage Harbor. "It was a classic little Cape Cod boat," Betty recalls, "and we loved it."

By now they had sailing in their blood, and when they moved to Houston in the '70s they bought their first sailboat, a 19-foot Albacore, which they named SUNAF for their children Susan, Nancy and Frank.

"We sailed on Clear Lake where the astronauts lived," she recalled. "I learned to sail a bigger boat and I liked it. I liked the challenges of getting

from one point to another with the tides, the currents and the wind.”

In 1986 Len took an early retirement and they moved to Chatham, where they bought Chatham Hardware and operated it until 2002. “We liked Chatham,” Betty said. “We had lived in 10 states and decided that we liked this the best.”

They continued to enjoy sailing and decided to try a larger boat, moving up to an older 30-foot Cape Dory ketch they named Gigi. Betty realized that they needed to gain experience and knowledge from other sailors to fully enjoy their boat, and in 1995 they became members of the Monomoy Yacht Club.

Betty was elected secretary of the club in 1998 and a few years later was approached to begin the climb through the chairs from rear commodore to vice commodore to full commodore.

“At the time I wasn’t sure if the membership was ready to accept this move,” she said. However, she was persuaded that she had the boating experience and would be well qualified to hold the top position. The response from the membership has been “all positive,” she said, adding that “many of the women members are very encouraged by it.”

As a leader of the club, Magnusson has been active, along with others, in promoting the interests of recreational boaters in town, including pushing for the town to dredge the entrance to Stage Harbor this spring.

With the help of other sailors in the club, a core of members who enjoy cruising in and around Nantucket Sound, and as far afield as Provincetown, Essex, Conn. and Shelter Island, was organized. The Magnussons are charter members of the group. “It has developed an esprit de corps among the participants,” she said, and especially credits her husband Len for his work in organizing the effort.

She is looking forward to the next two years as she moves into uncharted waters as the first woman commodore for the Club. “We have a marvelous membership,” she said, “and I am open to ideas from them for things they’d like to do.”

In 2000 Betty and Len bought their current boat, a 37-foot Pacific Seacraft they christened Rejoice, and they continue to sail whenever they can. The name Rejoice says it all.

“The name reflects the feeling of having the boat and enjoying the water,” she said.

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