



Tuesday, September 24, 2002

front

news

sports

opinion

audio

arts

page 3

higher education

beyond the gate

princeton & the world

personal dimensions

campus notebook

features

archives

Sailor Fortenbaugh '85 steers Manhattan Yacht Club, aids NYC

By **JULIE KESTENMAN**
Princetonian Staff Writer

"Do what you do best."

Following his University graduation, Michael Fortenbaugh '85 read these words — spoken by fellow Princetonian Malcolm Forbes '41 — in an article and took the message to heart. Today, 17 years later, he is doing just that, as commodore of the Manhattan Yacht Club.



Courtesy of Michael Fortenbaugh

Manhattan Yacht Club commodore Michael Fortenbaugh '85 poses with his wife Sharon at the Sail for America official review earlier this month.

At the club, Fortenbaugh is in charge of the day-to-day operations involved in running a company and handling the sailing operations. He also performs tasks such as walking on the docks and keeping an eye on the boats.

"I am extremely happy with my job and the club itself," Fortenbaugh said in a phone interview. "I have the best job in New York City — I am around people when they are having a great time."

Fortenbaugh's passion for sailing began many years before he would accept his current position at the yacht club. Even as a young boy, he sailed with his parents in the Jersey Shore town of Bayhead.

At the University, Fortenbaugh was a shy student who has fond memories of walking around campus, he remembers. He was a legacy at Cap and Gown Club, where his father, a graduate of the Class of 1958, was also a member.

"Orange and black runs in my blood," joked Fortenbaugh, whose brother attended Princeton, as well.

It is no surprise that Fortenbaugh was a member of the University's

Ar

Curre
Fa



A Bea
Images, i
inform.
mov
inspirati
Jol

Summe
Pr
Th
Princetor
2001 Ec
announc
of a sum
program
Latino
st
Read n

Summer Program
Feedback
Subscribe
E-Prince
PocketPrince
RSS Feed
Advertising
Staff

sailing team. He also joined the wrestling team during his Princeton career.

Academically, Fortenbaugh focused on 20th century American history and wrote his senior thesis on graffiti in the New York City subway.

While Fortenbaugh enjoyed his classes, he is quick to stress that the University meant more to him than just lectures and problem sets. "Princeton taught me how to learn and keep learning after graduation," he said.

The summers after his sophomore and junior years, Fortenbaugh worked on Wall Street and seriously considered starting a career there. "It opened my eyes to another kind of life," he said. "I moved to New York City and enjoyed the variety of people that I met there."

With graduation looming, many of his friends accepted lucrative jobs in investment banking and trading. But for Fortenbaugh, the acquisition of money was never a driving factor.

"I was more interested in doing something unusual," he said.

Fortenbaugh recalls looking out on New York Harbor around this time and thinking, "Man, that is a great body of water. There should be some sailing here."

In 1987, the Princeton graduate made his vision a reality when he founded the Manhattan Yacht Club. "I had a lot of enthusiasm at the time and was ready and willing to take on projects," he said. "When most people move to the city, they give up their boating and sailing activities and I wanted to change that," he said.

Sail for America

Through his job and his daily life in New York City, Fortenbaugh has gained his own personal understanding of the city's inhabitants. For him, the past year has been about returning to normalcy, while also trying to create something extraordinary. After fleeing the city in a powerboat on Sept. 11, his family was one of the first to move back into their Gateway Plaza apartment in lower Manhattan. Since then, he has been working as part of New York's healing process.

An avid sailor, Fortenbaugh took the lead in planning the single largest gathering of boats in New York Harbor — Sail for America. On Sept. 14, 2002, 1,200 yachts gathered in the waters off Manhattan, displaying American flags and over 3,000 commemorative flags adorned with the names of all those who lost their lives on Sept. 11.

"It is a great honor to be a part of the process of rebuilding and healing in New York City," Fortenbaugh said. "All of these sailboats were a vision of hope and beauty."

Looking
a
Due to o
dynamic
content,
Daily P
Onli
precedi
2000
access
Archi
Howeve
find t

Sail for America's program of events included yacht races, three parades of boats flying the memorial flags and the start of "Around Alone," a single-handed (one person aboard ship) around-the-world boat race.

The weather was beautiful for the Sail for America Memorial Regatta and the Lady Liberty Regatta, which both took place that Saturday.

On Sunday, Sept. 15, "Around Alone" — a single-handed (one-person) around-the-world race started from Ground Zero, marking another first for New York Harbor. A race of this kind had never before begun in the city.

With the media splashing pictures of devastation and tragedy on America's television screens after Sept. 11, Fortenbaugh came up with the idea for the sailing program to paint a resilient picture of the American spirit. His interest in visual expression in New York City, stemming from his thesis, came through in this creative project.

The boats' flags — triangular pennants in red, white, and blue — were the idea of Catherine DeRubbio, the wife of a New York firefighter, who lost her brother-in-law in the attacks. She e-mailed her suggestion to Fortenbaugh after learning about the Sail for America on the internet.

The organizing committee and the families of the victims immediately embraced the proposal. "Everyone thought that it was such a powerful idea," Fortenbaugh said.

Northeast Flags offered to produce the pennants at a cost of \$12 each. The event planners raised the money to pay for all 3,026 flags through requests for sponsors on the group's website, www.sailforamerica.com. Originally, the organizers were not sure if they could raise sufficient funds, but by September 9, 2002, individual donors had pledged all the money needed for the project.

The website is now filled with pictures of the event, messages from supporters and details of the weekend's program. It also offers a sentimental hope for the pennants: "After flying in the harbor, these flags will then be given to the families and it is hoped that in 20 or 50 years, a child would open a box in an attic and find the flag and remember his or her connection to this singular event in the history of our nation. These memorial flags will provide a lasting form of recognition."

The outpouring of e-mails and messages that Fortenbaugh has received from the victims' families are proof that this was a worthwhile endeavor. "The support and the event really exceeded all our expectations," he said.

The weather was beautiful for the Sail for America Memorial Regatta

and the Lady Liberty Regatta that took place at the Saturday event, as well as for the parade of boats on the harbor — American and memorial flags waving in the wind on each one.

On Sunday, Sept. 15, "Around Alone," a single-handed (one person), around-the-world race, also started from Ground Zero, marking another first for New York Harbor. It is the first time that a race of this kind has started from the city.

Sail for America, a one-time event, proved to be a unique way to commemorate those who died in the attacks a year ago, and to celebrate New York City's strength.

New and unusual projects

Now that the event is over, Fortenbaugh said that he is finally getting back to the "basics." He looks forward to some long-needed rest and relaxation with his wife Sharon Phair, associate publisher of the avant-garde magazine 'Paper,' and their two young sons, ages seven and five.

Fortenbaugh said he likely will return to campus this fall, along with his father, to cheer at a football game or two.

But don't expect Manhattan Yacht Club's commodore to be idle for long. He is already planning a program for the Beaux Foundation in the visual arts to send young New York City artists to Paris for art tours. The project should begin in two years.

From the Yacht Club to Sail for America to the arts, Fortenbaugh continues to pursue his dreams and to prove that he is not afraid to get his feet wet in new and unusual projects.

Copyright 2002 Daily Princetonian Publishing Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed in any manner.
Please send comments, questions and inquiries to newsroom@dailyprincetonian.com.