

Editorial Vineyard Gazette 7/17/2007:

### Messing Around in Boats

Considering the Island's long and rich history in seafaring traditions, dating back to the canoes of the Wampanoags and the sailing and steaming ships of European colonists and their American descendants, it is especially satisfying to see the rebirth of a new set of connections to the waterfront.

The second annual Vineyard Cup held earlier this month is showing every sign of becoming a full-fledged celebration of the Island's maritime heritage, spanning the gamut from sailboats slicing through the waters off East Chop and on Menemsha Pond to the rowing gigs and windsurfers. More than one thousand participants-an astonishing number-joined together in a weekend of racing to benefit Sail Martha's Vineyard, the nonprofit organization that provides free sailing instruction for the Island's youngsters.

It was quite a sight that weekend to watch the home-grown flotilla head out for a day of racing on a deep blue Sound flecked with white from gusty, early summer winds.

Sail Martha's Vineyard, which just a few short years ago was still in its infancy, has established itself as an anchor nonprofit, its mission at once vital and unassailable.

In a quiet yet continuing way, the ocean also continues to draw young Vineyarders to work on and along the water. As boats fill the Island harbors for the summer season, most of those attending to their needs and minding their safety are Islanders in their late teens and early twenties. Many of these young people are the children of sailors and commercial fishermen, and like their parents, have grown up messing around in boats.

That many of these young wharfingers return year after year to the pleasant Island harbors is no surprise. But what some may not realize is the danger that the jobs can pose, or the responsibility that the wharfingers routinely carry.

They stand in a historic line. For centuries, Vineyarders of their age took on hard, skilled work and helped lead other sailors, whether on whalers or fishing schooners. Like their forebears many of today's wharfingers feel the lure of a life interwoven with the ocean.

In these capable young sailors and in the burgeoning success of the Vineyard Cup, the Island testifies to a seafaring legacy that still grows