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New sailors learn lesson in liberty

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Between shouts of "Don't let go of the rudder!" near-crashes, confused looks and rough landings were the rays of sunshine. They came in forms of looks of happiness, squeals of joy and comments like "nicely done!"

On the docks at the Hood River marina a new group of kids was learning to sail in the week long program through Hood River Community Education.

The course is designed to teach kids between the ages of 8 and 14 about the basics of sailing and handling a boat. Dan Falk and his wife, Wendy Robards, a pair of Seattle-area school teachers and avid sailors, are in Hood River teaching the classes for the summer. They hope that the classes will have a lasting impact on their pupils.

"I don't remember the first time I rode a bike, but I clearly remember the first time I sailed on a boat," Falk said.

Falk described learning to sail as a liberty, or earned freedom, which comes with responsibilities.

"We are teaching them lessons in liberty," Falk said. "By teaching them to do dock and tack they are learning earned freedom."

Before they could get in the water, the new sailors had to learn basic handling and safety and to demonstrate that they knew how to handle the modified Opti boats.

The students were taught how to switch hands behind their backs while maintaining control of the rudder when they turned the boat.

While Falk made it clear that letting go of the rudder would be like letting go of the handlebars on a bicycle and peddling as fast as you could while you were



Photo by Ben McCarty

MIKAYLA KIYOKAWA handles the rudder while Marit Knapp relaxes in the front of their Opti boat during their first day at the Hood River Junior sailing program on Monday.

about to crash, some of the students were worried about the crash itself.

"What if we capsize?" one of them asked. Falk was ready for

that possibility. "What if you capsize, what is the first most important rule?" he asked the students. "Stay with you boat!" eight voices responded in unison.

After mastering basic handling safely on the dock, the kids were ready to head out onto the water, and mixed results ensued.

"How do you feel?" Robards

asked 8-year-old Kimmie Boquist after she returned from her first tack. "I feel sea sick," Kimmie responded. But that didn't stop her from going out again.

Eleven-year-old Petra Knapp's run was going well until she found herself stuck to the inflatable dolphin that served as the boundary for the course.

"What do I do?" she called back over the water. Robard quickly began giving her instructions to get free of the dolphin, and within seconds Petra was loose.

The only boy in the group of eight, 9 year old Garrett Kelly, spent a good 15 minutes just trying to get back to the dock his first time out. However, soon after that he drew raves from Falk for expertly bringing the boat in.

"Ooh! That my friend was a Zen-like landing," Falk said, as Garrett brought the boat gently to a stop at the dock.

Along with getting in experience on the water, the kids learned that letting go of the rudder did in fact cause them to lose control of the boat, and that failing to assume to the safety position on the way to the dock would



Photos by Ben McCarty

PETRA KNAPP gets hung up on the floating dolphin used as the boundary for the junior sailors. She was able to free herself moments later.



Photo by Ben McCarty

KELLI CLARKE receives a high five from instructor Dan Falk following a "Zen-like" landing at the docks during the Hood River Junior Sailing program.

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cause the boat to go flying into the dock at a high rate of speed, causing fellow students to quickly pull their legs out of the water and an instructor to brace the boat to stop it from plowing into the dock.

At the end of the morning, the kids took apart the boats and put them away, because as Robards said, "Failing to put the boats away is like picking your nose in

public: it's just not ok."

Former British Prime Minister Lloyd George, who led his country through World War I, once said, "Liberty has restraints, but no frontiers."

After three hours of training and sailing, the children in the Junior Sailing class were very aware of liberty's restraints, some having gone in circles trying to reach the dock, others having gotten stuck on the floating dolphin, and several having had close calls with the swinging boom.

However, both they and their

instructors could see the frontiers opening up before them.

Some who were scared to go out on their own were filling up with confidence at the end of the session; others who took several tries just to make it back to the dock were sliding the boat gently up against the firs; and best of all no one had either fallen or jumped out of a boat in panic.

"The looking forward to tomorrow," Falk told them as they prepared to pack it in for the day. "Tomorrow is going to be another big day."

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GARRETT KELLY checks to make sure that his knots are secure before getting final instructions on how to handle the boat while out on the water.

