



Rochester's Cross Currents Minority Rowing is making it possible for more minorities to get into the highly underrepresented water sport

By Amy Cavalier

The sport of rowing has fascinated Lydia Boddie-Rice since she was a college student attending Brown University.

"I always thought it was a very majestic activity," she said. "From the perspective of a team activity, the synchronization, the amount of team work and support to be manifested in this entity gliding down the river was just so beautiful to me."

Her class schedule conflicted with crew practice, so she couldn't join. When her oldest daughter joined crew at Northeastern University, it piqued Boddie-Rice's interest in rowing again. At the age of 50 her interest got the best of her. Six years ago, she agreed to help pull together a team, and she's been rowing ever since.

"This really was a personal journey; a health and fitness quest," she said. "It's a lifetime sport for me. I'll do it until my body gives out and I can't do it anymore."

Now a competitive rower, Boddie-Rice is making a difference by engaging more minorities in the underrepresented sport, raising money to make rowing affordable, and putting Rochester on the national rowing scene.

It started when Boddie-Rice asked a former co-worker, who was also executive director of the Genesee Waterways Center, about getting involved in rowing. It just so happens the co-worker was in the midst of setting up an urban corps to encourage more minority participation in water sports and rowing. Boddie-Rice, who was an outreach specialist for RG&E at the time, agreed to help apply for a grant

and get the team going.

In 2006, Boddie-Rice founded Cross Currents Minority Rowing, a group aimed at encouraging minorities to participate in water-related activities, with a focus on rowing, by providing equipment, training and resources to participate in the sport.

It started with eight people, including Boddie-Rice's husband Greg, and Cross Currents has since exposed hundreds of minorities, from 14 to 70 years old, to rowing. With the assistance of teammates and supporters, Boddie-Rice has raised over \$100,000 to support the cause.

"My passion is around never saying no to anyone who wants to participate," she said. "I do not want economics to be a barrier to participating in the sport because I feel it's technically challenging and physically demanding. That kind of dedication should be rewarded."

Cross Currents was able to purchase their first eight-person shell through a sponsorship from Rochester Gas and Electric. Last year they purchased a four-person shell with help from Rochester General Hospital and the Wilson Foundation. Boats cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$20,000 and up.

Cross Currents has a corps of about 20 to 24 active rowers. Members come from all walks of life, Boddie-Rice said, from executives, educators and students to physicians, health and social workers, and finance, business and legal professionals. The same year Cross Currents was founded, USRowing's Diversity Task Force began researching the reasons for a lack of diversity in the sport of rowing.

USRowing is the national governing body of rowing in the United States. The association makes the policies, safety rules, and oversees all university, high school, for-profit and non profit rowing teams. It is the national governing body over the US Olympic

and National Rowing Team, according to Richard Butler, inclusion manager for USRowing.

"What we found out is that there's a huge American perception that it's an elitist, white sport," said Butler. "If most Americans think of it like that, then it's going to be even tougher to reach the low income, economically challenged youth because of the perception of not being accessible."

Butler was hired in 2009 to change the perception of rowing and to reduce some of the obstacles that stood in the way of minority involvement in the sport. Not long after, he received a call from Oscar Pedrosa, executive director of Cross Currents. Butler was ecstatic. He said Cross Currents exemplifies a model America Rows team. Most of the America Rows diversity programs are youth-focused. Cross Currents is one of only two adult masters programs in the country.

"We've kind of flipped the model, and that's what National liked, that there were adults interested in the sport that then could model the sport for younger people," Boddie-Rice said.

In 2010, the group was endorsed as America Rows Rochester team by USRowing's Diversity and Inclusion Program. Cross Currents was not only one of the first American Rows affiliates, Butler said, and the group is at the forefront of USRowing's Diversity

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Initiative.

"Today they are part of my main presentations and I'm in cities all across America," he said.

Rochester will be the site of the first ever America Rows Invitational on Saturday, July 30 at the Genesee Waterways Center. Butler hopes to have at least 10 to 15 crews from all over the country row in the invitational to showcase their diversity, inclusion and community outreach programs, and to compete.

"It's exciting," Boddie-Rice said. "It's also very intimidating."

Butler said Boddie-Rice's passion for sharing the sport with others is amazing. And her level of commitment is matched by hers and the other members of the Cross Currents corps' skill as rowers.

"They're not just rowers, they're good rowers, and they have fast boats, and she would like the national rowing community to know that they exist so she works tirelessly raising money for the program to purchase boats, coaches, equipment, and this is all free, pure sweat equity," said Butler. "Oscar and Lydia do this on a volunteer basis. People quit PTAs that do less."



Boddie-Rice

