

18 February 2010

OTTAWA ROWING CLUB PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2009

Congratulations to all members on our banner year. When you look at the RowOntario and Henley results from our competitive programs, and add the continuing growth and success of the recreational and instructional programs the club continues to succeed in all aspects of the sport demonstrating our commitment to rowing at all levels and in all programs. It is this breadth and depth of programming that makes us a leader in the rowing community. And the respect the rowing community has for our club was made clear as I attended provincial and national meetings before Christmas. Of course our crowning achievement as a club this year was the recognition given to the Ottawa Rowing Club as RowOntario Club of the Year.

In describing the success of our club, medals and statistics are not enough. Each year I tell you of the intangible that best tells me where we are succeeding or failing, which is the feedback I get from members on an ongoing basis. In addition to the spectacular improvement and growth in our programs over the past two years, my observation this year is that I think this is the happiest I have ever seen the membership. This is certainly the most positive year I have had in the four years I have been in office.

I would like to highlight some of the accomplishments of the ORC in 2009 to show you how great the rowing community is at our club.

Excellence

We had our best year ever at the Royal Canadian Henley, with 7 wins, second overall in that category, 24 boats in finals, third best, 44 ORC rowers participated in the finals, again third best. Also at Henley, the Masters program produced one gold medal and four other finishes in the top ½ of finals and the adaptive program fielded one rower who finished third. ORC's performance at the ORC Championships was similarly impressive, with 55 finalists (out of 339), second only to Saint Catharines and second overall in medals won, with 28. ORC crews attended the US Elite Nationals, with six athletes/crews reaching the finals and Morgan Jarvis winning the Lwt 1X. Quite an accomplishment for a club competing against the US National Team and some of the best clubs in the US. The ORC once again dominated the Eastern Rowing Association regattas, winning the historic Comstock Trophy at the ERA Championships, completing a sweep of the decade in winning this historic trophy.

Participation

The Ottawa Rowing Club continues to grow, reflecting a trend of the past two years resulting from diverse programs and a convivial atmosphere that has

increased member retention, and increasing conversion of rowers from instructional programs to full memberships. Competitive memberships have risen sharply over the past two years, almost doubling from a few years ago. Recreational memberships continue to rise, combined with increased retention of recreational members reflecting success in the "Rowing for Life" philosophy.

Participation in High School programs remain strong and the ORC has managed to broaden the program, welcoming Elmwood back to the club and seeing strengthened programs at Colonel By and Lisgar Collegiates – watch out Glebe! Participation in fall University programs through the club continues to attract many more potential athletes than we have capacity to accommodate. However we also have to be concerned about the limited support the two universities give to rowing and we need to ensure varsity rowing programs attract serious, year-round athletes.

In the past two years we have been implementing the long term athlete development (LTAD) model, moving toward small boats and sculling for younger athletes, which has not only improved athlete performance, but also improved participation rates. Our development program has seen us retain significantly more athletes from the high school season through the summer and fall, with the focus on development, not competition, making for a more manageable training regime for youth.

Our Adult Rowing League continues to sell out early in the spring and draws hundreds to the club on Thursday evenings in July when the ARL race nights take on a festival like atmosphere drawing athletes and friends alike. We would like to examine ways to expand this to a corporate league to take advantage of boat availability in the month of August. Our summer Youth Camp continues to be a popular activity, as well as being a good source of athletes for ORC programs. We will also examine how we can integrate youth campers into the LTAD model to improve their athletic development and start them on the journey of rowing for life. And we sold out almost all of our summer Learn to Row sessions, a first.

Our Masters program has grown again this year, with many of our age-challenged athletes distinguishing themselves at the Royal Canadian Henley and RowOntario championships. 2010 will be a very important year for the Masters with the World Masters Regatta being held in St. Catherine's in early September. The ORC continues to work on improving adaptive rowing at our club, searching for ways to overcome site and equipment limitations. A new ramp in front of the old boathouse in 2010 will make access to the docks much easier for disabled athletes.

Capacity

The ORC has been very active in the past two years in finding ways to

improve our capacity to support all members. This is a significant challenge, while more members bring more revenue, we are severely limited by planning considerations and the amount of space we can use on our site. As such, through 2008 and 2009 we concentrated on replacing many boats in our fleet and adding new capacity in small boats. The combination of new club equipment, along with more and more members acquiring private singles has meant that the club is now actively looking for new boat storage options having outgrown our two boathouses. We are working actively with the City of Ottawa and the National Capital Commission on options for expanding our use of the limited land available to us on our site and it now looks like we will be able to expand our outdoor compound in 2010 to make more room for secure outdoor storage.

In 2008 we hired a new Head Coach, which has brought significant benefit to club competitive programs. Our coaching budget covers approximately 1/3 of the club's overall budget, which is a large proportion compared to other clubs. However, in the fall of 2009 we consulted the membership and determined that there is support to take our coaching program a step further in adding a second professional coach to assist the Head Coach. We also do much more than most clubs to support volunteer competitive and recreational coaches through subsidies for coaching training, honoraria, travel and official recognition.

We are also concerned about increasing our umpire capacity, having trained a number of new apprentice umpires who this year assisted at a number of regattas as part of their training programme. However we need to continue to recruit new umpires to take the place of a contingent of volunteer umpires who have supported competitions for many years, but who will be looking for relief in the near future.

We continue to work on improving administrative capacity – another priority we clearly heard in our member consultations last fall. This year saw us successfully use on-line registration for the Head of the Rideau and we have also used it for winter training registration and club social events. With a threefold increase over the past decade in transactions for registration and events, we have realized that the thousands of transactions per year are far too much for volunteers to manage and improving the administration of the club is a priority. As such we will implement online registration and payment for all programs and activities in 2010 and we have engaged the services of a professional bookkeeper, who assist the Treasurer in ensuring your money is properly administered and accounted for.

We completed the restructuring of the ORC Executive Committee in 2010, electing a Vice President Competitive Programs to compliment the VP Recreational and Instructional Programs, which has helped the executive to better manage both program streams. My initial impression is that this has been a success, as has changing board terms from 3 to 2 years.

Our volunteers continue to be the backbone of our success and this year we formally recognized many of the long-term volunteers that help with our Adult Rowing League, which is a significant fund-raising activity for the club. Many of the long-time ARL volunteers received RowOntario Volunteer Recognition Certificates and we honoured Mel Bryce and Brian Storosko, our retiring ARL organizers with the Club's highest honour, the Service Award.

Interaction and Community Engagement

The ORC is the largest of three rowing clubs in the National Capital Region and as such, often is the "face of rowing" in Ottawa-Gatineau. We continue to cooperate with our sister clubs, the Ottawa New Edinburgh Club and Burnstown Rowing Club through participation and support at each other's regattas, exchanging information and encouraging cross-pollination of membership.

The ORC hosted the annual PD Ross Challenge Trophy race on the Rideau Canal in downtown Ottawa for the first time ever. The PD Ross Trophy is a varsity challenge trophy that dates back to the 1950s and the move to the canal is a significant step toward raising the profile of university rowing in Ottawa.

The ORC site continues to be a hub for social activities in downtown Ottawa. Located along Canada's ceremonial drive (Sussex Drive), it is the only location offering public access to the water in the city core. As such, the ORC Interpretive Centre has seen a significant increase in business this past year for social and corporate events, even drawing some corporate events to use club equipment for team building activities on the water. I would like to thank Donna Makin, who has volunteered for many years to run the rental program at the Interpretive Centre and who is stepping down this year. Activities in this facility continue to raise the profile of the club considerably in the National Capital and we will continue to try to take advantage of this award winning facility to interest people in rowing and the ORC.

We continue to work with local institutions on training options for our athletes. Last winter saw a successful partnership with Carleton University as a winter training site and we have often used other options, such as winter cross training with national swim coaches and local cross-country ski teams.

The City of Ottawa is our landlord and we work closely with the Parks and Recreation department to ensure our facilities provide a safe and functional environment for our rowing programs. I would like to recognize their support, particularly in the work they do on maintaining and repairing our boathouses.

The Way Ahead

Continued growth and success brings challenges in our ability to support

our members. Our facilities are bursting at the seams on a site that has little room for expansion. Boat use continues to rise and with it, increased maintenance and repairs. And the success of the competitive program is bringing with it more travel and more expenses.

Therefore, my focus in this, my last year as President of your club, will be to ensure we find ways to manage our growth so that it is sustainable while continuing to serve the needs of all the members.

The administrative changes mentioned earlier are an important facet of ensuring we are able to manage our resources efficiently and effectively on your behalf. Adding an Assistant Coach should bring significant benefits to the competitive programs in relieving many of the pressures on the Head Coach and giving more support to the volunteer coaches who are critical to our success. And we need to put more effort into recruiting the next cohort of volunteers, from the President and Executive, to new umpires, to volunteers for the ARL program, to people to help with regattas, travel and crew and program administration. As you will have noticed, many of the key volunteers have been around for a very long time. So it is incumbent on members to volunteer to step into some of these positions to allow those who have served long and well an opportunity to take on new roles in the sport or other walks of life. Recruiting a strong group of volunteers to guide the rowing and administrative sides of our club will assure the long-term success of the ORC.

Finally, this is my opportunity to thank a number of people who I work closely with throughout the rowing season. First are Andy Hall and Chris Waddell, who covered my responsibilities for the first half of 2009 as I was off on my great adventure in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Andy deserves additional recognition, as he steps down from the role of Vice President Recreational and Instructional Programs at this AGM. He began his Executive service as VP Programs three years ago and when we split that role a year later, he continued to be the driving force behind the success of recreational and instructional rowing at the ORC for two more years. I also want to thank an excellent team who has served with me on the Executive Committee this year, in addition to Chris and Andy, Chris Masson, Lana Burpee, Derek Howe, Jennifer Shortall, Elijah Malacuso and of course, our Head Coach, Siobhan McLaughlin. Chris W. and Lana have both volunteered to serve another term on the Executive Committee, for which we should be grateful, as they bring great strength and experience to their portfolios. Of course the final person I want to thank is Brian Adams, who I am happy to have as the heart of our club.

In closing I think the Ottawa Rowing Club merits the title Club of the Year every year, and that is why I have been proud to serve as the ORC's President for the past four years. When Bobby Snider and I sat around the camp in Kandahar last year we talked a lot about what we missed and the common theme, aside from family, was our shared love of rowing and the Ottawa Rowing

Club. That motivated me to take on a second term as President and now that I am home and in the final year of my term, I look forward to another great year for the ORC in 2010.

Mike Walker
President
Ottawa Rowing Club
Page 1 of 6