

# Giving Something Back

Volunteering around  
Puget Sound

By | Joyce Major



from left to right:  
Nancy, Oliver,  
Karen, Michael,  
Brig, Honey Bear  
the dog and Bill,  
returning in high  
spirits from a  
cruise with the  
volunteer-aided  
organization  
Footloose, for  
disabled sailors.

**Dangling my feet** from the edge of my houseboat a few years ago, I watched sailboats flying past each other in a Duck Dodge race on Lake Union. I saw the intensity on one skipper's face as he raced past my dock, the wind filling his sails. A duck swam down the channel paddling her feet and wiggling her tail. As laughter drifted over from a nearby houseboat along with the smell of barbecuing burgers, I felt how lucky I was.

Thinking about the buckets of memories I have of Lake Union and Puget Sound, Lake Washington

and local rivers, I realized how little I'd done in return. Volunteer work seemed one way to work off my debt of gratitude, and looking into it, I found dozens of water- and boating-related organizations throughout the region. Many of these rely heavily on volunteer work.

Fresh off several stints volunteering around the world, and home again in Seattle, I began exploring local volunteering. I started with the Footloose Sailing Association, which is dedicated to bringing competence and independence on the water to the disabled.





## FOOTLOOSE

Though it's the off season, Bob Ewing, one of the founders and a current board member of Footloose, meets me out at the Leschi marina on a cold windy day. Maneuvering his wheelchair over to the dock, he directs me to three boats in need of bilge pumping, a volunteer chore available throughout the winter.

Footloose is open to people of all ages and all disabilities, and gets people out on the water either just to enjoy themselves, or to learn to sail. "People start

two Martin 16s, three Columbias and the Boston Whaler chase boat. One of the Martin 16s is equipped with an electronic system that allows a quadriplegic to sail with joystick or sip-and-puff control. The severely disabled are often confined to chairs on land, and rely on an assistant for everything. "Imagine their joy to be able to choose what direction to go and where to sail without having to ask for help," says Ewing. "It's an hour of freedom and control. We foster independence and are rewarded with smiles."

**"I taught a blind girl to feel the wind in her face, and she took the tiller and started sailing, yelling 'Get out of my way, there's a blind lady steering this boat!'"**

working together, helping each other," says Ewing. "I have seen stroke victims become more verbal as the environment seems to open doors. We even have love stories, with three marriages that began here between our sailors."

During their outings, Footloose may have 30 people out on the water, sailing the organization's four Access Dinghies,

Footloose training sessions start in April, and sailing sessions run from May through September. Skippers are always in demand to help with the twice-monthly weekend sails, but there are other volunteer positions too. They need administrative help throughout the year, shore-side registration help at events and dock volunteers to get the ▶

above: The weekend cruise to Blake Island in July is always a big hit with Footloose members and volunteers.

below: Nancy and Bill, with Honey Bear, at the Elliot Bay Marina, in Seattle.





## LAST OF THE LOCAL BREED

The schooner *Wawona*, sister ship to the *C.A. Thayer*, should have gone to Davy Jones' locker long ago, but she limped along for decades on shanty sings and other fundraisers, a generous city lease and bursts of volunteer labor. Meanwhile, she was given icon status.

"Politicians, ugly buildings, and whores all get respectable if they last long enough," says John Huston's Noah Cross in "*Chinatown*." By the same token, becoming a Northwest icon is practically a ticket to immortality.

At 165', the *Wawona* is one of the largest three-masted schooners built in North America, according to her owner, the Northwest Seaport Maritime Heritage Center. Built in 1897, she first hauled lumber to San Francisco, then hauled cod from the Bering Sea. Seattle civic leaders bought the boat to create a maritime museum in the mid-60s, and she has since seen occasional efforts to hold rot at bay. But the bigger the boat, the bigger the maintenance, and we're talking about one big boat. Getting *Wawona* back into shape would cost tens of millions of dollars and the sea-shanty business just isn't paying that kind of freight these days.

Two years ago, the City of Seattle—*Wawona's* landlord—started efforts to evict the boat from her free South Lake Union moorage to make way for the new



photo: Anita Nowacka

Lake Union Park. The city asserted the boat's backers had more than enough time to raise money for a restoration. Preservationists played the icon card, countering that the *Wawona* is a central part of the region's maritime heritage.

Finally, Northwest Seaport and the city agreed to have parts of the vessel brought on land and put on display near the park entrance in a "*Wawona* Memorial." Estimated cost: \$2 million. Northwest Seaport is seeking donations and grants. —Eric Sorensen

Ready for its closeup: The schooner *Wawona* has struggled against time and rot for a chance to be memorialized.