

EMYC Sails to Success—A Club History

by Ronald D. Schroeder



EMYC members sail Marblehead class boats. The shopping mall, left, extends behind Edinborough Park's Centrum building, right. The Centrum building serves as EMYC's base and meeting place.

EDINA MODEL YACHT CLUB SAILS TO SUCCESS

By Ronald D. Schroeder

It stands to reason that Minnesota, the state whose license plates proclaim it the land of 10,000 lakes, is home to a fast-growing RC model sail and electric boat club.

But what sets apart this two-year-old club from others across the country is its unique origin and its successful alliance with a suburban Minneapolis City government. What's more, the club was started by an Edina, Minnesota City employee who wasn't even a RC model boat enthusiast.

The 50-member strong Edina Model Yacht Club (EMYC) was the brainchild of Edinborough Park manager Bill Bach. Bach's task in early 1991 was to find a recreational activity for the park's lake that serves as the centerpiece of the upscale Edinborough Park/Centennial Lakes shopping and residential complex.

"We wanted an activity that would match the lake's uniqueness," Bach says. "And those of us on the development team recommended that we look into RC boats."

Today EMYC is sanctioned by the American Model Yacht Association and is incorporated in Minnesota as a nonprofit organization. EMYC's credibility has given the city of Edina reason to recognize RC boating as a legitimate sport. Club members are usually found sailing a variety of models any evening or weekend that the ten-acre lake is free of ice and the weather is agreeable. In its organized races, the club competes with East Coast 12-meter and Marblehead class sailboats. EMYC's "Parade of Boats," held annually in early summer, gives members a chance to demonstrate and display boats and recruit potential members.

The club as it exists today, flourishing in its environment of government cooperation, belies the fact that a great deal of research and organization went into its creation.



EMYC Rear Commodore Ralph Peter's impressive 54-inch Robbe Schooner proves indeed that much good can come from an eight-month Minnesota winter. The building behind the schooner is part of the residential complex at Centennial Lakes.

Early in 1991, Bach, working with a University of Minnesota intern, began the initial steps of evaluating the feasibility of developing an RC boat club for the lake in Edinborough Park. Bach liked the idea of RC boating for the lake for three reasons: it provides a friendly use of the lake, it makes the lake a place of performance, and it creates an activity in which people can participate without getting their feet wet. So Bach began the process of gathering information on RC boats and boaters. Bach turned to AMYA AND NAMBA as sources that could supply support information that would help him decide what to do. What Bach found was that, although there were Minnesotans who belonged to these organizations, no RC sail or electric boat club existed in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Hopeful in what he found, Bach decided to hold three informational meetings in August 1991. At the meetings, Bach distributed a survey asking about interest in an RC boat club. The meetings included discussions about the direction a club might take and about expectations of both city employees and RC boaters.

To spark interest, a variety of RC sail and electric boats was displayed at the informational meetings. Included in the display were RC sailboats that Bach had commissioned Minneapolis professional model maker Boucher-Lewis to design and build for Edinborough Park's rental fleet.

Bach compiled a list of local RC boaters who attended the informational meetings or heard about the sailing activity from friends. Invitations to a meeting in September 1991 were sent to the people on the list. At the September meeting and the monthly meetings held through 1991, EMYC set sail as RC boaters and city of Edina representatives began dealing with the formalities of creating a well-managed club.

Club members began writing bylaws and articles of incorporation. At the same time, EMYC applied to the city of Edina to be recognized as the city's official authority on RC boating.



This beautiful Marblehead class boat belongs to EMYC member Paul Olsen.

At the beginning of 1992, Bach sent a second survey to the RC boaters who had shown an interest or participated in EMYC up to that time. The survey addressed RC boaters' perceptions of the club and gauged how involved members wished to become.

Member involvement was especially important because although the city of Edina initiated the club, Bach knew that EMYC's success depended on weaning the club of some city assistance. If indeed taking more ownership is a measure of success, EMYC proved itself at this past summer's "Parade of Boats." "The organization of last summer's 'Parade of Boats' was impressive, especially the way club members tightened up the details. Coordinating radio frequencies, creating demonstration programs, and operating the different activities was really a sign of maturity," says Bach.

When Bach took the pulse of the club with the second survey, a few RC boaters complained that EMYC was too organized and decided not to join the club. Bach quickly points out, however, that all RC sail and electric boaters are welcome on the lake although EMYC members do have frequency priority.

That's where the benefits of having a city government on deck are realized. EMYC's recognized status gives club members exclusive rights to sailing times and events. The alliance with the city of Edina also gives EMYC credibility and strength. The association is mutually beneficial because EMYC gives the city a vehicle with which it can monitor the sport.

For example, gas RC boats aren't allowed on the one-quarter mile long lake because of its relative short length and because noise could be a problem for condominium owners just 50 yards away. If someone were to challenge the gas-boat ban, the city of Edina and EMYC, along with Bach, together become the entity to whom the grievance is aired.

As the meetings went into 1992 and EMYC members adopted bylaws, received incorporated status, elected officers, and established \$20 annual dues, a sense of real trust emerged.

"There was a good trust factor between the city of Edina and EMYC members. The members saw that we as a city had a genuine interest in RC boating and that we weren't leading them down the wrong path," Bach says.



Spectators enjoy a display of assorted RC boats in Edinborough Park's Centrum building, during the club's Parade of Boats event.

EMYC members wholeheartedly agree that trust and cooperation are corner stones in the club's success. "As an RC boater you get used to being kicked off lakes," says Paul Olsen, EMYC member. "But the city of Edina really wants us to be here. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to see if it's really happening."

The spirit of cooperation between EMYC and the city of Edina is apparent in their experience with the park's rental fleet. The RC sailboats, rented to the general public for \$3 per half hour, were sometimes returned damaged or broken and often required maintenance. Especially susceptible to breakage was the two-piece keel/ballast assembly. EMYC members designed a more rugged sailboat that would better withstand rough treatment by inexperienced renters. Unlike the sailboats in the old fleet, the new boats have ballast that's molded into the hull and employ a protection fin around the rudder.

The rental fleet represents an important part of EMYC's philosophy because it allows anyone to participate in the club. Model boat enthusiasts unable to afford the high start-up cost of RC sailing may begin with a rental boat at a relatively low cost. The rental fleet also typifies the interdependent relationships that help make EMYC successful. Some of the boats in the rental fleet are sponsored by retailers in the Edinborough Park/Centennial Lakes complex. A retailer buys the sailboat and makes a \$50 donation to EMYC. In return, EMYC members build the boat and affix the establishment's name on the sail. The city of Edina benefits too from the revenue that the rental fleet brings.

EMYC's affiliation with the city of Edina entitles the club to hold its meetings in a 600-square-foot room with plush furniture and a fireplace inside the Edinborough Park Centrum building. The Centrum building also is used during the club's "Parade of Boats" to house an information booth and various boat displays. About ten feet from the Centrum building lies the lake. The lake's chief function is to collect rain runoff from the surrounding complex and streets so the water quality isn't good. That's why RC boating serves the lake so well. The lake's bottom is covered with a rubber liner that lies beneath a foot of sand. At its

deepest, the lake is about nine feet. The launching area consists of over 150 feet of concrete retaining wall which includes built-in bleachers for spectators.

Air currents over the lake are an exaggeration of actual winds because of the buildings that surround it. The air tends to drop in and winds occasionally become gusty. Despite its relatively small size, the lake can become slightly rough. But this usually isn't a problem because Twin Cities winds are for the most part light.

But for the club itself, sailing has been smooth. EMYC members, city of Edina officials, Centennial Lakes merchants and Bach all consider the club an enormous success. For Bach, EMYC's achievements have been especially rewarding.

"My greatest satisfaction is seeing something that I initiated take off to a point where EMYC members have taken ownership. The members are controlling the club in concert with the city. We both think that we've got a great thing going. And so the ultimate satisfaction is that after only two years, EMYC has proven to be a win-win proposition," Bach says. "We both feel we've got the world by the tail."

More information about EMYC may be obtained by writing to: Edina Model Yacht Club, Centennial Lakes Centrum, 7499 France Ave. So., Edina, MN 55435. Information about forming RC boat clubs may be obtained by writing to: American Model Yachting Association, c/o Patricia Hein, 1884 Campus Ct., Rochester Hills, MI 48309; or North American Model Boating Association, 1815 Hailey St., San Diego, CA 92154.