# Racing with

## Whether for fun or competition, Prairie State sailing is catching on.

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*The allure of casting off and spending a day—or week or lifetime—sailing to exciting, romantic destinations flows through the waters of Illinois.*

The reasons people take to the open water are as diverse as the types of vessels in which they sail. Some look for a relaxing means of escaping the monotony and pressures of the work week. Others seek the freedom, adventure and exhilaration of exploring new and exotic environments.

Regardless of the motivation, sailing is a fun—somewhat physically and often mentally challenging—sport that draws people of all ages to the lakes of the Prairie State...and to the Illinois River in the Peoria area and Lake Michigan.

Sailing involves harnessing the wind to move in almost any direction you want. A sail is nothing more than a piece of fabric, held aloft by the mast, that acts like an airplane wing turned on its end. The sail creates areas of high and low pressure that provides the power needed for the boat to move through the water.

Getting started is easy.

# the Wind

**Sailing is a family-based activity that can start with small craft operated by youth taking summer lessons on a local lake, progressing to larger boats on Illinois' many reservoirs, the Illinois River, Lake Michigan—and beyond. The Chicago skyline provides a picturesque backdrop for the annual Verve Cup race.**

Start small and work your way up. Many people learn on a dingy, centerboard or daysailing keelboat. Boats under 25 feet in length offer a simple, inexpensive way to become acquainted with the sport.

After gaining experience on a smaller craft, some people progress to the larger vessels commonly seen on Lake Michigan and the open ocean. Cruising keelboats or yachts are typically 20 to 60 feet in length and have an auxiliary engine. Larger boats allow cruisers the space to move around the deck and enhance opportunities to socialize on the water. Depending on the model or type of cruising boat, they can offer below-deck accommodations for sleeping, preparing meals and getting out of the weather.

Summer sailing classes for children as young as 6 offer the opportunity to learn the sport (terminology, knot-tying, parts of a sailboat, sailing techniques, reading the weather, navigation and racing skills), gain confidence and an understanding of the importance of teamwork.

Above all else, anyone considering becoming a sailor (or boater) must develop an understanding of water and equipment safety. A boating safety

**Many of Illinois' larger lakes and reservoirs offer marinas where sailing enthusiasts can dock their vessel, and anyone can sit under the trees and watch boats tack through the water.**

course—learning about the rights-of-way rules, types of safety equipment required for safe boat operation, distress signals and more—is a small investment of time that yields enormous benefits while on the water.

After developing their sea legs and gaining experience and confidence, many sailors venture into racing. Local, national and international regattas take place on Illinois waters. Some races are organized with handicap standards to accommodate differences in boats. For extreme competitors, the Chicago Yacht Club, founded in 1869, has hosted the Lake Michigan Verve Cup since 1964. Held in August and based from their headquarters at the foot of Monroe Street along Lake Shore Drive, the weekend-long regatta consists of three courses with more than 200 competitors sailing in one-design boats, offshore fleets and junior races.

Not quite ready to set sail? Spread a blanket under a tall oak tree on the bank of one of Illinois' large lakes or reservoirs, or the shores of Lake Michigan, for a becalmed view of colorful sails working the wind.

**For a different perspective on the world, and a chance to step away from the hectic work week, consider setting sail on Illinois waters.**

Sailing provides participants with a different perspective of the world. The whisper of wind on your face and mesmerizing splash of water against the hull of the boat can lull you into serenity and help you forget the world. Slipping quietly across the water, without the noise that often dampens conversation and frightens away wildlife, can be a welcome change from traffic and cell phones. Working hand-in-hand with crew mates, friendships can be built that will endure both the weather and the test of time.

Whether your view is of the Chicago skyline, the banks of the Illinois River or the parks and residential areas adjacent to a lake or reservoir, sailing opportunities exist in the Prairie State. Get onto the water and bring out your adventurous side.

## Boating safety courses

Illinois law allows persons at least 12 years of age and less than 18 years of age to operate a motorboat only if they have in possession a valid Boating Education Certificate of Competency issued by the Department of Natural Resources, or if they are accompanied on the motorboat and under direct control of a parent of guardian, or a person at least 18 years of age designated by a parent or guardian. The Boating Education Course consists of a minimum eight hours of instruction on the basics of boating safety, equipment, navigation, registration and titling, emergency measures and Illinois boating laws.

Many civic organizations, park districts, schools, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power Squadrons and other interest groups sponsor boating safety classes throughout the state. For a list of upcoming classes, visit www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/education/SAFETY/boat.htm or phone 1-800-832-2599.

There are a variety of ways to learn to sail. For local sailing lessons, check with a university, sailing association, aquatic center, park district, yacht club, scouting organization or youth group. Also, from local chapters of the U.S. Power Squadron you can draw upon the vast experience of members during water outings conducted throughout the year. For offshore sailing lessons, research chartered vacations. A web search will reveal listings for local and exotic sailing information.

Another option is to hook up with a friend and learn the basics by crewing on their boat. Many sailors are willing to take on an eager crew member and show them the ropes. Also, visit local sailing and boating shows to speak with exhibitors and attend educational seminars.