

BY
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A STAND-UP IDEA



How a few clubs are using stand-up paddling to attract and retain active new members

When prospective members walk into the lobby of the Harbour Island Athletic Club & Spa in Tampa, FL, they say, “This is a cool place,” according to Garrett McCoy, personal training manager at the club.

In the lobby is a stand-up paddleboard, a piece of sports equipment that looks like an oversized surfboard.

Long popular in island and coastal communities, the sport of stand-up paddling, a hybrid of kayaking and surfing, is now thought to be the fastest-growing sport (water or otherwise) in the world. With celebs like Jennifer Aniston and Jimmy Buffet jumping on board (pun intended), stand-up paddling has a cool factor that a canoe doesn’t. Growth of the sport is spreading to



Photos courtesy of Chandler Williams of Mochus Photography

boards and was added to Harbour Island's insurance, and the two firms, along with McCoy, split the proceeds of the SUP classes, which are an additional cost for members.

The 500-acre WaterColor Resort in Santa Rosa Beach, FL opted to outsource its SUP program, too, to Santa Rosa-based YOLO Board LLC, one of the leading manufacturers of stand-up paddleboards. The SUP program is available to both WaterColor resort guests and residents who are part of the community's HOA. The boathouse where YOLO houses the boards and teaches is run through the resort, but offers discounts for residents and is looking into offering storage for residents who own their own boards (or buy them through YOLO once they get hooked).

"It is a way we show that membership has its privileges," says Patrick Murphy, general manager of the resort.

THE 411 ON STARTING WITH SUP

Harbour Island Athletic Club & Spa's Garrett McCoy has three pieces of advice for those looking to get their members (and prospective members) out on the water.

- 1. Prepare for repairs.** Boards get damaged; it is part of the sport. Make it clear up front who is responsible for repairs: the club, the member, or the outside vendor. Put your terms in writing. Training someone on staff to repair small dings and replace fins will save time and money once the program takes off.
- 2. Think resale.** Because paddleboarding is a hot sport, and the boards can be pricey for individuals, used boards have high resale value. McCoy estimates that he can sell a used board for 90 percent of what he paid for it. So if a program doesn't work out at a club, it is possible to recoup much of the capital outlay.
- 3. Count.** It is hard to know exactly how many boards (and paddles) you need to stock a fledgling program, but between four and six is good for a starter effort. Four students for one instructor is a reasonable ratio, and if you are taking members to a river or lake off your club premises, four is the maximum number of boards to try to load on one car roof rack.

inland communities, like Nashville, TN, Hot Springs, AR, and Boise, ID, where paddlers take to lakes and rivers (and even private ponds and pools) instead of the ocean. As a result, private clubs are starting stand-up paddling (SUP) programs as a way to attract active folks with disposable income looking for a paddling community.

"A kid in his early teens can do it, as can a 60-year-old. I cannot think of many other activities where that happens," McCoy says. "The big draw of stand-up paddling is that

it is fun, relaxing, and a wonderful core workout. And it is hipper than kayaking."

Harbour Island's management initially balked at the cost of starting a stand-up paddling program, despite the broad demographic draw. There were concerns about buying the equipment (about \$1,000 per board and paddle) and the logistics of liability insurance necessary for a water sport.

McCoy developed a program partnering with Urban Kai, a Tampa-based SUP instruction company. Urban Kai owns the



WaterColor Resort offers stand-up paddling to HOA members as well as resort guests. The sport has been a draw for families and others.

Murphy says bringing YOLO in to run the family-friendly program has been a boost to the HOA and the resort because it has helped people learn a pastime, meet other members with similar interests, and feel more connected to the resort.

“We don’t have someone there just to earn a paycheck. We have someone there who is enthusiastic. The excitement comes across when you have the right people promoting the product,” he says.

In this case, the right person is Tom Losee, one of YOLO Board’s founders, who teaches from the WaterColor boathouse. Losee is seeing more private clubs offer SUP, and not just off the beautiful Florida coasts. Clubs as far north as Connecticut are getting in on the trend, some taking advantage of their proximity to natural bodies of water, others using ponds and small lakes on club property. YOLO (which stands for “You Only Live Once”) is developing a series of programs specifically for clubs, with fitness components and initiatives that give clubs a portion of sales when



members buy their own boards. Other paddlers and board manufacturers are working with clubs in Australia, helping them to set up SUP programs in private clubs.

“There are other sports, like kite boarding, that came and then died out, but I don’t think [SUP] will go away. People like being out on the water, they like the great exercise, and if they fall, it is a soft fall on the water,”

Losee says. “The more they do it, the harder it is to stay home on the weekends.” ²⁰

About the author:

Margaret Littman is the executive editor of Club Management magazine and an avid stand-up paddler. She’s looking forward to paddling Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans during the CMAA World Conference in February.