

//EXECUTIVEDIVERSIONS

MAKING WAVES

EXECUTIVE: Kris Self, founder and owner of Island Computer Consulting in St. Pete Beach. Billing herself as a “technology concierge,” Self, 62, is a former Apple systems engineer who specializes in setting up high-end home automation and entertainment systems. She also works with small businesses and can set up communication and navigation systems for cars and boats, then train owners how to operate them effectively.

DIVERSION: Sailing. Self has been sailing since the early 1980s, when she moved to Florida. “My dad became interested in sailing, and then my brothers started sailing as well,” she says. “Well, me being me, I thought, ‘I can do anything they can do.’ I became the galley mate, but that was fine; I was just happy to be on the boat.”

Self mostly sails in gulf waters near St. Pete Beach but has made a couple of trips to Captiva Island, the Dry Tortugas and the Tobago islands in Trinidad and Tobago.

OLDIE BUT A GOODIE: Self bought her first boat, a 1981 Navigator named Capella, about seven years ago. “She is an old lady, but we have a lot of fun,” she says.

Self managed to connect with a former owner of the 33-foot vessel, a woman in her 90s who now crews for Self. “She’s amazing. I had the boat for about six months when I finally met her. She came aboard and I’m like, ‘Jane, what is this? Why do we have this? How does this work?’” Jane helped Self get Capella’s stove working, and now “we eat like queens on the boat.”

Self, by the way, is no longer the galley mate. “There are a couple of ladies who sail with me who are much better cooks than I am. So, I try not to cook if they’re on board.”

LADIES FIRST: Self’s can-do attitude about sailing stayed with her through the years, and she’s made it a personal mission of sorts to get more women into sailing. Her regu-

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[Sailing] makes me feel like a whole person; it regenerates me. If I’m not working, I’m probably sailing or doing something sailing-related.

Kris Self

More than four decades ago, sailing hooked Kris Self, a technology consultant based in St. Pete Beach. Today she’s part of a global movement to get more women into the sport.



MARK WEMPLE

KRIS SELF aboard Capella, her 33-foot sailboat.

Below: Capella under sail on the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.



COURTESY PHOTO

lar crew is all women, but she’s not opposed to having men on board.

“When I first got the boat, I only had female crew because I knew I was going to be making mistakes, and I knew the women wouldn’t be judgmental,” Self says. “But now I do it because I want to work with women who are interested in buying a boat and women who sail with their husbands. I want to get them out [with me] because then they learn different things and they see different things.”

Self has taken her ladies-first mentality to the Internet, launching a Facebook group for aspiring and current female sailors in the Tampa Bay region.

“Starting that group was one of the most fun things I’ve done in a long time,” she says. “We’ve got more than 850 members, and we’re a subset of the international Women Who

Sail group.”

Women Who Sail Tampa Bay, Self adds, will host four seminars at the St. Pete Power & Sailboat Show scheduled for Jan. 20-23. She’s also been in touch with Tracy Edwards, who skippered the 100% woman-crewed Maiden in the 1989-90 Whitbread Round the World Race, about making an appearance in St. Pete that would involve extolling the benefits of STEM education for young girls. Edwards, whose story was told in the acclaimed 2018 documentary “Maiden,” is widely credited with breaking down sailing’s gender barrier.

THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE: Sailing is a learn-by-doing sport, but over the years Self has soaked up a great deal of formal training, taking courses offered by the Power Squadron and Coast Guard Auxiliary. She also took a diesel engine

maintenance class at Mastry Engine Center, a Clearwater-based Yanmar marine engine dealership.

“That was a game-changer for me in terms of boat ownership,” Self says. “The thing about sailing with my brothers is, I never had to do anything with the engine, either the diesel engine or the outboard engine for the dinghy, and so [engine maintenance] has been a huge, steep learning curve for me.”

She adds, “When I first bought the boat, as far as I was concerned, the engine was a stinky loud thing, and I didn’t want to go near it or touch it. And now I can change the belts; I can refill all the fluids; I can clean the raw water intake; I can open the compression on the valves if I have to; and I

can talk intelligently to my mechanic, which is half the battle.”

BEYOND A HOBBY: Sailing transcends hobby status for Self. It’s become a lifestyle, a regular practice like yoga, running or working out. “If you look at my calendar, sailing is on there in ink,” she says. “The only thing that makes it negotiable is weather or if I have crew or boat issues. I have to make it a priority. It makes me feel like a whole person; it regenerates me. If I’m not working, I’m probably sailing or doing something sailing-related.”

— Brian Hartz