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FALL 2015



The Offshore Sailing School was co-created by Sailing Hall-of-Famer Steve Colgate.

A sailor's life: Colgate's experiences on the water leads to induction into the Nt'l Sailing Hall of Fame

By BRIAN WIERIMA

Being able to make a nice living that is usually a hobby to most, has given Steve Colgate lifelong experiences normal folk can only dream of.

Sailing the world for the quest of adventure and competition, Colgate's life of sailing has brought him to the peak of his nautical lifestyle, with his induction into the National Sailing Hall of Fame.

The 80-year-old Colgate is in the NSHOF Class of 2015, along with J.J. Fetter, Paul Foerster, Meade Gougeon, Jan Gougeon and Sam Merrick. The class will be inducted Oct. 4, during a weekend of ceremonies at the Bay Head Yacht Club in Bay Head, N.J.

"I feel like one of the luckiest guys in the world being able to live these experiences," Colgate said. "(The Hall of Fame) is the peak to my sailing career."



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Colgate literally has a lifetime of competitive sailing achievements, including six Trans-Atlantic races, two-record setting performances, numerous sailing racing victories and influencing a sport that is matched by very few.

In his Hall of Fame bio, it states, "Steve Colgate has not only impacted recreational boaters, he has steered his own yacht, *Sleuth*, to impressive wins and sailed thousands of miles of blue-water racing and round-the-buoy competitions as helmsman, tactician and crew on sailboats he helped bring to the winners' circle. Colgate started his racing career at age 19 on his first of six Trans-Atlantic Races, racing from Cuba to Spain on the winning yacht '72 yawl *Mare Nostrum*. He immediately went on to participate in his first of seven Fastnet Races; and in 1979, on his Frers 54' *Sleuth*, he won his class in the 1979 Fastnet where winds hit more than 80 knots, 15 died, and many yachts retired."

Colgate also is recognized as influencing thousands of sailors through his Offshore Sailing School, which he started in 1964 in

New York City. Although some years had rough waters, Colgate and his wife, Doris (who is the CEO and President of Offshore Sailing School), persevered through them and built a successful business, which now has a wide range of locations at South Seas Resort on Captiva Island, Scrub Island and Tortola on British Virgin Islands and at Pink Shell Resorts at Fort Myers Beach.

It's been a prosperous life sailing the seas of the world, and it's one Colgate feels fortunate living.

It all started at the bottom of the totem pole

Jumping in head first as a competitive sailor was the only way to go for Colgate.

His introduction to competitive sailing came as a young boy as a crewman on a lightning sailboat in Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y.

A chance popped up to be a bailer, a kid who would bail the water on a wooden topside sailboat for a 33-foot boat Atlantic Class race.

As his experience grew as an Atlantic Class crewman, he was able to compete in

the Championship races, which took place on the east coast. During those weeks of competition, crewmen would be housed by yacht club members.

For Colgate, he stayed at the famous novelist John Hersey's home. Hersey was famous for writing the Nobel Prize winning "A Bell for Adano" and publishing "Hiroshima."

"My first introduction to racing was staying with John Hersey at his home," Colgate said. "Seeing him write his novels, which he did in longhand, was quite fascinating."

But Colgate's real action in competitive racing didn't occur until he was 19 years old, when he received a call from his mother, who was vacationing down in Florida.

"She called me up and asked if I wanted to go on a Trans-Atlantic race from Cuba to Spain," Colgate recalled. "I said absolutely!"

His mother happened to be golfing with a friend, who's brother-in-law was looking for a crew to help man a yacht, which was owned by a Spanish millionaire.

"Woody Perry was his name and he told

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Sailing Hall-of-Famer Steve Colgate often sails the local Southwest Florida waterways, a longtime member of the CMCS.

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my mom, to bring me down," Colgate said. "I had about six days to get trained and down there. My father told me, 'The sea isn't always a lady.' But I said I'll go."

The yacht was a 72-foot yawl named *Mare Nostrum* with a 33-foot open cockpit.

"It was the biggest boat I've ever been on up to that point," Colgate said.

The 1955 Trans-Atlantic race started in Havana, Cuba, and ended in Spain.

Colgate's job was the lowest one on the totem pole, where he had to lay down on the bow and call the jibing.

The three-week venture was a dangerous one, as the doctor of crew found out, when one of the winches came free and chipped a bone off his wrist.

On another unfortunate occasion, a spinaker (the large sail flown in front of the vessel while heading downwind) broke off and

slid under the front of the boat.

"We were going quite fast and it was like putting on the brakes," Colgate said. "We stopped immediately and it snapped in half. But the owner of the boat said, 'There was too much sail up there anyway.'"

"One thing he taught me that day in which I still carry along with me today, is 'Tomorrow will be a better day.'"

The *Mare Nostrum* won that Trans-Atlantic race, setting a race record.

Colgate made a very positive impression on the owner and he was asked to help man the crew of his first of seven Fastnet Races, held in England.

He would go on and race in five more Trans-Atlantic races, even taking fourth out of 14 boats as a Watch Captain in 1963, despite losing a rudder 1,000 miles off the shore of England.

In 1979, his Frers 54-foot *Sleuth* won the Fastnet Race in his class, where winds reached more than 80 knots, as a result, 15 sailors died from different boats.

"We had one or two of the crew retire from sailing after that," Colgate said.

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But it didn't deter Colgate's love and competitive spirit, as he competed in the 1964 Olympic Trials, missing the cut by just one boat, but qualifying for the 1968 Olympics with Gardner Cox.

"That was an honor, because only 13 sailors from the entire United States made the Olympics," Colgate said.

His other quests involved being an alternate for the Pan Am Games in 1963 and a couple of ventures in the America's Cup. Other conquests included 20 Newport-to-Bermuda Races, two Sydney-Hobart races, five Antigua Race Weeks and too many others for Colgate to remember.

"I would have no idea how many races I've been in, it just depends on what year it was," he answered.

But his prosperous success in the competitive sailing world was not kept to himself, but instead, he was able to share his knowledge and experiences through his venture he started in 1964, the Offshore Sailing School.

Teaching others the art of sailing

One aspect of sailing with some of the best sailors in the world was the chance to learn from them.



MELISSA SCHNEIDER

Local Sailing Hall-of-Famer Steve Colgate had the opportunity to take lessons from several "legends of the sea."

For the most part, these legends of the sea were gracious in teaching and it's something Colgate soaked in his entire life.

"I learned an awful lot watching all these other professionals, I've been exposed to some of the greatest sailors around," Colgate said. "They have been very giving of their

knowledge."

In return, Colgate transferred what he learned from the greats to others through the Offshore Sailing School.

It started as a one-boat business in New York in 1964, where he partnered with another

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The Offshore Sailing School has been considered America's No. 1 sailing school.

er gentleman who owned a 38-foot sailboat.

After a while, his partner got tired of the business and offered Colgate a chance to buy him out, albeit in an awkward and unconventional way.

"He was going through a divorce and he said if I would pay his wife what he owned her, which was \$3,600, I would get full control of the business," Colgate said. "I agreed to pay her \$100 a month for three years."

Times were tough, as the sailing school was only in business in the summer months.

But as time wore on, he met a dealer who had an Offshore 40, which tied in with his school's name.

"I leased it for one season, but I felt much better to go with a smaller boat to teach sailing," Colgate said.

That's when Soling sailboats came into existence and Colgate's school bought the first two in the U.S., where he eventually teamed up with a yacht magazine based out of Chicago to run a school in the Bahamas for 10 weeks during the winter season.

Experts were brought in on a weekly basis to help teach, with Colgate learning from these experts, as well.

The Offshore Sailing School stayed in the Bahamas for about seven years, before moving to Puerto Rico, where they spent three years.

"It was a tough, tough three years, because they were in the process of building a marina and the winds were tough

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to navigate going into it," Colgate added. "Also, we had 10 boats just sitting there all summer long, so we decided we needed a year-round location, and Florida was a natural fit."

Doris and he toured around Florida looking for that ideal location in 1974, sailing from Port St. Lucie to Key West to Marco Island.

Colgate was eventually referred to a place called South Seas Resort in Southwest Florida on an island called Captiva. After a second call to the resort, he was connected with the general manager of the resort, who heard of Colgate's school in the Bahamas when he was a manager of a hotel there.

"He told me to come right over, because he heard how I brought in a lot of people to the Bahamas," Colgate said.

By 1975, Offshore Sailing School was inhabiting South Seas' marina, which was much smaller back then compared to now.

"There were little fishing cottages and a small marina with a natural harbor," Colgate said. "We created some docks and put all our Solings into those docks."

The sailing school filled 650 room nights that first winter and the rest was nautical history, as the Offshore Sailing School now has eight locations.

Colgate's racing career has many, many highlights, with two of them being on record-breaking performances in 1955 and 1985, when he was the Watch Captain and Principle Helmsman.

His legacy also includes a specially designed sailboat to teach students called the Colgate 26, which was created by his concepts and designed by Jim Taylor.

The vessel is the official training vessel of the U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Coast Guard and Maine Maritime Academy.

Now 80 years old and the chance to take a breather from a treasure of experiences, Colgate's accomplishments can be celebrated with his induction into the National Sailing Hall of Fame.

"It feels like making the Olympics again, because only 13 from the whole U.S. made it," Colgate said. "There are only 42 in the Hall of Fame, so I take it as quite an honor."

The National Sailing Hall of Fame was cre-

ated in 2005, and has a mission to focus attention on the Americans who had made outstanding contributions to the sport of sailing.

"The six members of the class of 2015 are joining 42 previously-recognized individuals whose achievements —on-the-water, at a drawing board or in the administration of the sport — have inspired and affected competitive sailors and recreational boaters alike," said President of the NSHOF Gary Jobson. "By recognizing these contributors and hearing their stories, the NSHOF is preserving the history of the sport and its impact on American culture while inspiring the next generation of sailors."

Colgate has set the bar high for future sailors with a sailing career which is matched by few, but also his legacy will be felt through the many sailors who were directly influenced by the Offshore Sailing School.

Now Colgate's name will live on forever as a National Hall of Famer, something which is well deserved after a successful life on the sea and sail.



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