

Small Business

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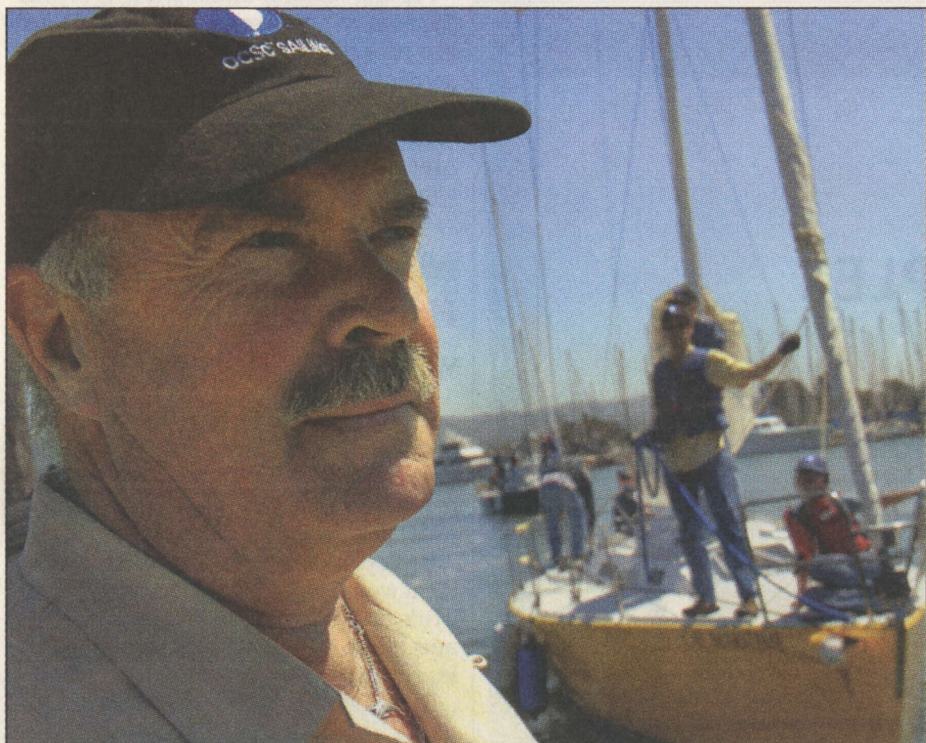


HOLDING THE BAG ■ 27

Mary Frances Shaffer talks about reinventing her line of purses.

“People don’t need to feel like they’re good at sailing, they need to feel like, ‘Boy, if I had more time at the tiller, I could do this thing.’”

Anthony Sandberg
Founder, OCSC Sailing



Last year, the company also formed OCSC Adventures, where their clients sign up for treks to other corners of the world. The first was to the Andes.

Not bad for a company Sandberg started at the Berkeley garbage dump with one boat and \$2,000 of his own money.

OCSC’s classroom techniques are also used in corporate teambuilding sessions. That’s where a company brings its employees to the Berkeley marina for a day to learn to sail and to discover how to work together.

“To maneuver a boat properly, communication is absolutely key,” said Sandberg.

One Friday in April, employees from TEECOM set out to learn sailing and teamwork. It was the Oakland engineering firm’s first team-building experience at OCSC. Cecilia Trost, company president, said the lessons about teamwork from San Francisco Bay translated well back to the office.

“It was rewarding and it was fun,” she said.

Sandberg relies on clients like Trost to promote the school through word-of-mouth. OCSC doesn’t advertise — one of the business decisions Sandberg learned from his father. It might seem like a strange philosophy, but his father used it when he operated restaurants. His theory was if you provided a good product, people would tell other people.

That philosophy has been in place from the start.

Sandberg, who grew up in a sailing family, came to California, hoping to “revolutionize the sailing-lesson business.”

SNAPSHOT: OCSC Sailing

What it does: Sailing school and corporate team-building events.

HQ: Berkeley marina.

Founded: 1979.

Founder: Anthony Sandberg.

Start-up capital: \$2,000 of Sandberg’s personal money.

2008 revenue: \$3 million (projected).

2007 revenue: \$2.6 million.

2006 revenue: \$2.4 million.

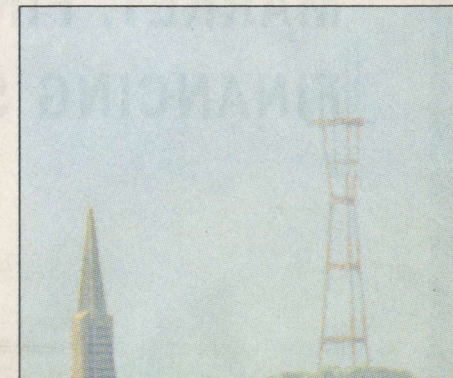
Employees: 80.

Web site: ocscsailing.com

Key challenge: Hiring top-notch instructors.

Growth pitfall: Expanding too quickly.

Future plans: Water resource center, healthy restaurant.



Student sailors fill school's sails

OCSC Sailing school charts its course with confidence

BY DAVE MILLS

San Francisco Business Times Contributors

The sport of sailing isn't growing, but OCSC Sailing school is hauling in plenty of new students.

Founder Anthony Sandberg attributes the success to the school's teaching approach. At most sailing schools, Sandberg said, students are in the classroom for three hours before they ever hit the water. At OCSC, clients spend 15 minutes indoors before venturing onto a sailboat.

Sandberg said the best place to learn is on the water. The feedback is immediate. The goal at the end of the day is for a student to feel confident in his ability to learn to sail and to work as part of a team.

"People don't need to feel like they're good at sailing," said Sandberg. "They need to feel like, 'Boy, if I had more time at the tiller, I could do this thing.'"

OCSC expects to bring in \$3 million in revenue this year, up from \$1.9 million in 2003. The company now has 50 boats, 80 employees, 1,200 members and 1,000 clients.

He searched the West Coast and decided San Francisco Bay was "right in the heart of the best sailing in North America." He went to a spot on the Bay's eastern shore on what was then the Berkeley city dump. He could see the Bay Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge and the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. He felt the afternoon breeze blowing back toward Berkeley. He also envisioned an easy launching point for boats to glide into the midst of the Bay's waters.

"I said this is the spot," Sandberg recalls.

Sandberg started the Olympic Circle Sailing Club in 1979. The next year, he made a crucial decision. He brought in Rich Jepsen as a business partner. Jepsen is now OCSC's chief executive officer and oversees the business side of things. Sandberg is the president and deals with the more creative aspects. The dichotomy has worked.

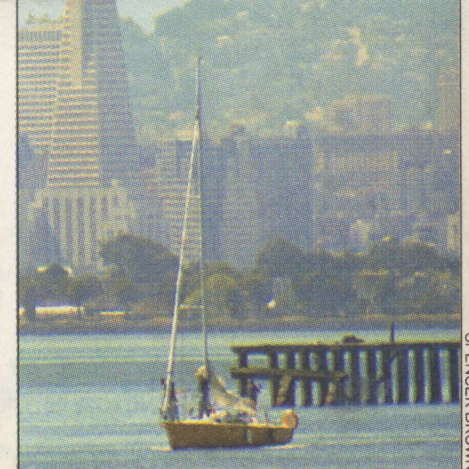
"Two of me would be a disaster," said Sandberg.

The split responsibility was solidified in 2002 when Sandberg shattered his leg falling down a cliff. The accident forced him to step aside and let Jepsen run the day-to-day operations. Now, Sandberg focuses on the instructional side and spends time away from the office. The setup has worked. In fact, maybe too well.

Sandberg said in recent years OCSC was expanding more rapidly than the company was able to handle.

"We started to stretch ourselves to the limits. It was too fast. It just wasn't fun," he said.

As the company's corporate team-building side of the business took off, growth was so rapid, OCSC instituted a limit of 15



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percent per year to make sure what they do, they do well.

A few years ago, they also thought about getting into the boat building business. They quickly realized that was not their expertise.

"That's a whole different way to lose money," Sandberg said.

For the future, Sandberg wants his facility to become a water resource center to promote water conservation and clean water practices. He also plans to open a restaurant at the marina that would serve healthy food rather than just fried fish and chips.

But the core of OCSC will always be sailing on San Francisco Bay.

"There are no fences out there, so you really have a sense of freedom," Sandberg said. "There are a group of people to share an experience and be fully together."

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