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PIONEER VALLEY RIVERFRONT CLUB



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ANNALISA DEAL

Imagine yourself rowing down a calm, peaceful river. The surface reflects twisting tree branches stretching across a softly lit morning sky. You breathe deeply enjoying the soothing serenity of a bustling city turned quiet with sleep. You look up to see a powerful Bald Eagle swooping down to clutch a fish in its sharp talons, or maybe to see the impressively long wingspan of a soaring Blue Heron. Perhaps you'd rather imagine yourself surrounded by friends, sharing a few laughs while kayaking down the river. Your oars smoothly slicing through the shimmering waves as you play an exciting game.

If you have more of a competitive edge, you might like to imagine yourself with eight teammates rowing harmoniously, but quickly towards a prestigious goal. You aim to be the fastest; to be the team that others instantly recognize as the top contender. No matter what your unique personality or specific inclinations are, there is a spot for you at The Pioneer Valley Riverfront Club, and they are excited to include you in their family.

The PVRC's boathouse radiates with a positive, welcoming energy. Although people commonly think of a club as being exclusive, this one is anything but. Everyone is invited, welcomed, and treated with respect. The staff, volunteers, and members greet you with the warmth of a familiar friend. Upbeat music – the kind you need to resist the urge to impulsively dance to – thumps from the stereo, as youths enthusiastically push their limits on ergometer machines, which simulate rowing. It's not surprising the facility has such a feel-good vibe when you consider the ingredients that hold it together. It has a rich history that dates back to 1901, when it was one of five boat-houses along the Connecticut River in Springfield. Today it is the only one that remains.

With the positive leadership of Executive Director, Ben Quick, a strong camaraderie is shared between members. The dedication of intelligent, fully invested community volunteers plays a strong role in making this a high quality environment.

Being involved in rowing or paddling is described as life changing by those who participate. It helps with self-confidence, finding one's inner strength, connecting with a community, team building, and overall health and wellness. As Ben says, "it creates a harmony."

He was in the process of encouraging his son's interest in rowing as a parent volunteer when Ben discovered his own love for rowing. He enjoyed skiing, snowshoeing, tennis and cycling, but there was something special about rowing. He started training as a competitive rower in 2014, and competed in the March 2015 Springfield Rockrimmon Regatta. He was selected and entered on a team of four in the Head Of The Charles® Regatta, which welcomes the world's best crew teams for an ultimate two day rowing competition in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Ben says that in this sport each person has a role that is crucial to the rest of the team. This means that everyone feels valued, but also respects each other as being necessary. It creates a lasting bond and "social connection beyond just the sport," that brings together "interesting friendships that wouldn't have otherwise happened." Rowing is also highly therapeutic and a great overall body workout.

Ben is at the start of his career as Executive Director, and with his genuine love for the work and strong belief in the philosophies established within the club, there is plenty of evidence to suggest the future of PVRC will be promising with his leadership. He says one of the best things about working there is having "an opportunity to share something you're passionate about." Of course, working with a gorgeous river view and kind-hearted people each day is incredible as well. Ben describes his co-workers and volunteers as a "dream team," and to see how animatedly he discusses their skills and work, it is clear to see how much respect and admiration he has for each of them.

One of Ben's focuses is engaging the community and promoting this incredible piece of river that is here for locals to enjoy. He says that rowing is a very accessible sport - anyone who can lift their arms above their head is capable. They also provide all the equipment you need to get started. These are compelling reasons to give the sport a try. However, even if a person was not interested in pursuing watersports, the PVRC also seeks to be a place the public can enjoy in other ways. A bike path runs alongside the river, offering an excellent opportunity for cyclists, walkers, joggers, and photographers to appreciate the majesty of the river. This river is there for the community, it is safe, and it is worth seeing.

Currently the PVRC is home to 120 members, attracting participants from towns including Longmeadow, East Longmeadow, Enfield, Windsor Locks, and so many more. All ages are welcome



and is an encouraging environment for youth; they bring vibrancy to the boathouse that is inspiring to witness. Coaches strive to teach youths stewardship of the river, their bodies, equipment, and community. They learn proper nutrition from a personal trainer, receive academic encouragement, and they are bonding over healthy activity. The sport offers them excellent opportunities and is highly regarded among colleges; one teenager that rowed here was able to obtain a full scholarship to George Washington University. The coaches help teach youths the skills they need to "build a strong base to have a high peak."



PVRC COACHES, L-R:
DAN MAHONEY, LILY CARBECK
& TOM SIDDALL

The boathouse also makes for an excellent venue. A beautiful stone wall surrounds the boathouse with a smooth top to serve as a seating bench. One could bask in the sun with a book in hand, have a picnic with friends while enjoying the glorious scenery, or comfortably watch an event. Bay State Bike Week is in May and the PVRC is all about celebrating human-powered, two-wheeled transportation. On May 15 from 11:00am-2:00pm is “Bikes and Burgers” on the Riverfront, a family event with bike rentals and free repairs available. May 18 at 5:45am there will be a 20-25 mile intermediate bike ride with breakfast provided. On May 19 at 5:45pm will be indoor riding or rowing, while watching “Klunkerz,” a film about the history of mountain biking.

Be sure to attend an exciting Dragon Boat Festival Saturday, June 25th at 9:00am. Dragon boats are 40 feet long, vibrantly decorated canoes with a dragonhead and tail. They are an impressive sight to see. Each requires a team of 20-25 people to operate, and there are openings for community teams. The minimum age



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requirement is 14, and each boated crew must have a minimum of 8 females. There will be plenty to enjoy as a spectator too, such as the Breast Cancer Survivor Flower Ceremony, music, food, vendors, and Asian themed entertainment, since dragon boating is a 2,000-year-old sport that originated in China.

“Water is a natural entity,” says Ben. “We cannot survive in it. We have to respect it, but I encourage people not to fear it. We are just one of many ways to get on the water, but you should come down and check us out. We have an open door policy to visitors, to guests and to giving tours. Our family needs more people.”