



Honorary Commodore's Comments

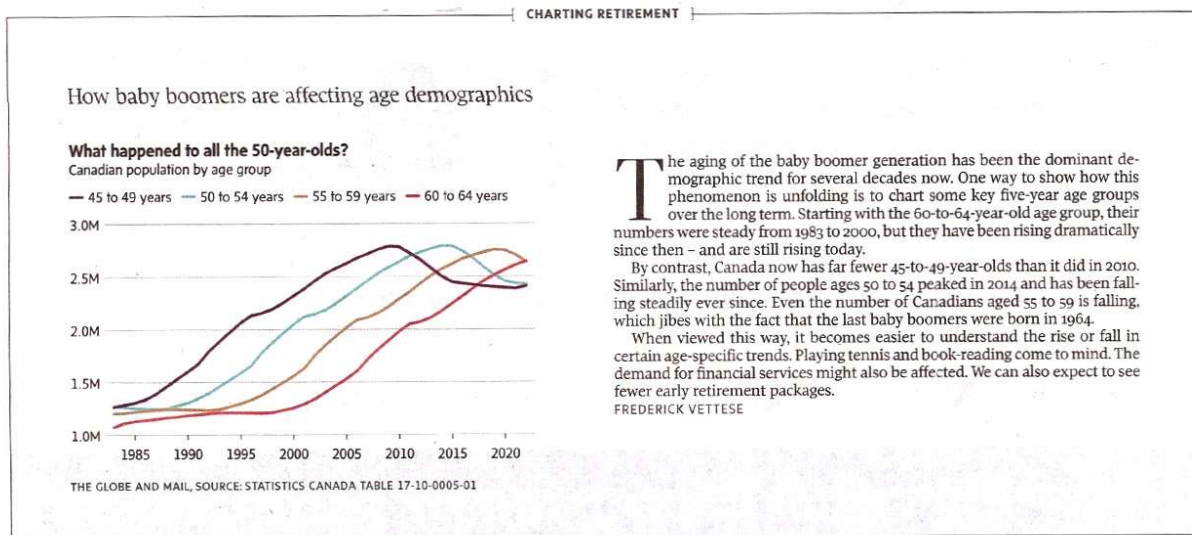
January 2024

Looking back at 2023 and the work done by our Association and that of the USWA, I can recall the excitement we had going into the season – one of the fullest slates of events that we had seen since before Covid descended upon us in 2020. We even had a resurrection of sorts with LDSC and Ottawa hosting an event in grand fashion. As always, we are completely beholden to the volunteers who willingly give their time and energy to organizing and pulling off the lovely regattas that we get to enjoy. The same, of course, applies to the cruising opportunities that our members participate in; the myriad of details that go into our events can be mind-boggling at times, but it gets done.

So, from my perspective, a big THANK YOU and WELL DONE is due to our Executive team, all of our organizers as well as the participants making it all worthwhile! I personally would have liked to be more involved in the action, but time & distance makes that hard for us. Looking ahead, the 2024 lineup of activities is shaping up nicely, so it should be a busy spring, summer and fall for everyone who can get to events in any capacity.

Of course, looking back is great, but what do we see then we look even further into the future, beyond 2024?

There was an interesting chart published in the Globe and Mail this past week. Although it was in an article about business employee retirement, it also can be easily applied to discretionary sports such sailing, alpine skiing and other outdoor sports.



Across many industries and organizations, there is a leadership gap in the 50-year-old category. There just are not enough of them to spread around! The generation behind them, while many are keen and willing to work and apply themselves to their job and other

endeavors, are also faced with less time on their hands and higher costs in everything from housing to groceries. Discretionary time and spending on things like sailing, or volunteering for anything in general, seems to be a thing of the past – volunteerism now seems to be almost the exclusive domain of Seniors. The younger folks are simply choosing NOT to get involved – there is not enough time, they say.

My home club (North Bay Yacht Club), is one such example. The average age of the membership has risen dramatically. When I joined that club 20 years ago, there was a strong cohort of 40 and 50 something aged people. We aged together and there has been some attrition, but many of the same people, now much older, are still running the club. Along with that, there has been a gradual but progressive shift away from sailing, more power craft are in the harbour and racing programs have floundered. Power boating is simpler and more predictable, is the thinking.

When I think about our Association, we have some similar issues. With few exceptions, the people on the executive now are the same people who were here 10, 15 or even 20 years or more ago. We have, as a group, aged together but have had few new people come in. Thank goodness for the likes of Ross and Eric appearing on the scene!

What is happening to us is not unique. The situation is the same in many sailing organizations across North America, Europe and the UK. Where exceptions exist, it is because of strong programs for young people to get access to sailing. Unfortunately, even in those situations, they are finding that young people move away from sailing after their teens – cost being a major issue. Many sailing clubs are not promoting dinghy sailing at all, a 25-footer now considered a “starter” boat. Thankfully, we still have clubs like Conestoga that have a strong junior sailing program. I wish there were many more!

The conclusion from these observations is that we need to find ways to bring in young blood to sailing and to Wayfaring. The decline in sailing interest and participation is a trend that really started in the early ‘90s; it has manifested itself clearly in the last 10 to 15 years. Countering the decline may not be easy or, perhaps, impossible. The issue has been the subject of online chat groups for years. However, from the perspective of our Association, we really must find new, younger talent to get involved in all aspects – Executive, Cruising, Racing, Class promotion – or we face extinction.

Looking back is great; there are so many memories and a great Class history to share, not just in 2023 but over the nearly 65 years since Wayfarers came to Canada. Those are the “Glory Days” as Uncle Al puts it. What will the future look like? What will be our legacy? That is where our real challenges lie! I table these thoughts for consideration and serious conversation throughout the course of 2024. It is our “elephant in the room”, a challenge that hangs over all of us as individuals, as a Class and as an Association.

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Honorary Commodore