



St. Paddle's Day becomes a destination event in spring

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After three years, the Alderbrook Resort & Spa's annual St. Paddle's Day celebration has grown into a full-fledged destination event for paddle enthusiasts and other watercraft lovers.

All day Saturday, March 28, the resort will host stand-up paddleboard clinics, rowing clinics, races and, new this year, stand-up paddleboard yoga with Shelton's Joonbug Yoga.

A second stand-up paddleboard clinic for women will also be offered on Sunday, March 29.

Participation in the races and the number of spectators has increased each year since Alderbrook's Cindy Sund, director of marine services, launched the event in 2013.

“It started with me wanting to put a spotlight on the lower Hood Canal as another paddling destination,” said Sund, who manages the resort’s marina and docks, as well as kayak, paddleboard and boat rentals. “I think lower Hood Canal is kind of a forgotten place here.”

Attention is often given to paddling in the San Juan Islands or near Bellingham, but the lower Hood Canal offers calm waters, a plethora of marine life and bird-watching, Sund continued.

“We just want to offer the best of Northwest paddling, whether that’s stand-up paddleboards or paddling with kayaks and other watercraft,” she said. “It’s also a kick-off to getting outside, brushing off the cobwebs and stretching your legs.”

In previous years, St. Paddle’s Day was held closer to St. Patrick’s Day, but Sund moved the event further down the calendar so as not to conflict with the group Sound Rowers’ races, and to have better weather, though that isn’t the top concern.

“What I’ve discovered about Northwest paddlers is they just put on their gloves and their Birkenstocks and wetsuit and they get out there,” she said. “The weather doesn’t affect them, it’s not really a factor. So this is more about celebrating.”

The Alderbrook Resort offers guests and day visitors a chance to rent kayaks year-round and stand-up paddleboards and hydro-bikes during the summer season, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Sund said.

The resort also rents motorboats, a party barge and skiffs and offers charter tours from the dock.

The emphasis on outdoor excursions sets the resort apart from other venues, Sund added.

“We always say that we have two front doors, one by sea and one by land,” she said. “It’s unique.”

Paddlers are encouraged to bring their own watercraft to St. Paddle’s Day, though a limited number of paddleboards and kayaks will be available for rental.

In previous years, paddlers of all human-powered watercraft raced in one event, but this year, there are three separate courses for kids, beginners (a three-mile course) and advanced paddlers (a seven-mile course).

“The event is growing in terms of the offerings,” Sund said. “We’ve never had stand-up paddleboard yoga. Before this was a chance to display your crafted boats. I just see it evolving more and more each year.”

Dan Gavere of Starboard SUP will host the stand-up paddleboard racing clinic, Evergreen Rowing will lead kids rowing and championship stand-up paddleboard athlete Lina Augaitis will run the kids and women's stand-up paddleboard clinics.

"People in the industry seem to be clamoring more to be a part of the event," said Kathryn Kamin, Alderbrook's marketing director. "This year is the first year where we have quite a full slate for all the different clinics."

Alderbrook is also providing a larger menu of food at the event this year, including Northwest hearty fare like clam chowder, and beer from the Ballard-based brewery Hilliard's.

Entry to the event is free, as is entering the races and taking part in kids' rowing.

Participation in the clinics and in the stand-up paddleboard yoga class ranges from \$10 to \$80, depending on the clinic. Pre-registration is highly recommended, especially for people who don't own their own watercraft.

The event has truly become an authentic paddler's event, Kamin said.

"It's not just a festival, it's a sight to be seen," she said. "It feels grassroots, it feels authentic. It's not an event that any hotel can have anywhere."

Sund is amazed with how much the event has changed.

"It's evolved into a more formal gathering," she said. "Who knows where it will go."

To view a schedule of events and to sign a waiver for the races, visit www.alderbrookresort.com/marina/st-paddles-day. Call 898-2145 for clinic registration.

<http://www.kitsapsun.com/news/local-news/north-mason/st-paddles-day-becomes-a-destination-event-in-spring>