Set Sail for Autism presents a unique opportunity for families affected by autism to experience the 2014 Bell’s Beer Bayview Mackinac Yacht Race, demonstrate the capabilities of young adults with autism to learn the skills necessary to perform effectively in the workplace, raise awareness of autism within the sailing community, and raise money to support the important programs of both the Autism Alliance of Michigan, and the ASA Macomb/St Clair.

About autism: autism is a general term to describe a complex group of brain disorders, also known as ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). Autism effects individuals in many different ways, but generally affects their social skills and ability to adapt to their surroundings. Autism effects one in 88 children born in the US today and is recognized as one of our nation’s most serious health problems. While we do not know what causes autism, we do know that with early diagnosis and treatment, and support from the community, all affected by autism can have a brighter future. For additional information on autism and programs available, please go online to autismallianceofmichigan.org.

One of the priorities of Set Sail for Autism is to have one of the Yachts competing in the race, include ASD Crew members. We realize this will require identifying young adults with ASD who have sailing experience, are willing to train with the crew, and demonstrate they are capable of doing all that is required to compete. We are reaching out to captains, who would be willing to take this on, and to families, that have young adults with autism, with sailing experience, who would consider crewing in the race.

Another priority is to identify, up to five yachts, who would be willing to have ASD crew members join them on the return trip from Mackinac. We are reaching out to captains who would be willing to take this on, and families with young adults with autism, who would consider this option.

In 2013, Paul and Dorothy Latham, owners of Engager, agreed to bring two young adults with ASD back on the return from Mackinac. The trip proved to be a wonderful experience for all involved. This is the article Paul wrote following the trip.
Following the 2013 Bell’s Beer Bayview Mackinac Yacht Race, I agreed to bring two young adults with autism, as crew members, on the return trip from Mackinac Island, on Engager, a Beneteau 40.7. On the trip back, I was joined by crew member Dan Collins, and the two young adults, Brogan, 15, and his mother Jenny, and Nick, 21, and his father Andy. No one knew what to expect.

The hope was that this endeavor would help these young men, as individuals, improve their social skills, learn new skills, and accomplish things their imaginations never would have entertained. In a broader view, it was hoped that the adventure home would demonstrate to a much larger audience, that Brogan and Nick could accomplish challenging tasks in such a complicated setting as returning a sailboat 204 nautical miles to its home port. The primary goal was to increase awareness and employment opportunities for adults with autism.

The aggregate of what was accomplished, was much more. We watched and learned ourselves as these young men learned new skills, asked very appropriate questions, showed they could accomplish complicated tasks when given proper demonstration with a little patience and compassion. It was gratifying to watch them gain in confidence and social interaction, and heartwarming to watch their parent’s pride grow as they accomplished new skills.

It was truly an enlightening experience for both Dan and I, but we see this as just the first step in achieving our primary goal of increasing employment opportunities for adults with autism. The sailing community can help make this happen. Dan and I would like you to consider sharing our same experience in the 2014 Bell’s Beer Bayview Mackinac Yacht Race.

Skippers, please consider one of two options. One, bring one or two young adults with autism, on the return trip, as an introduction to the sport, or two, with enough planning and sailing experiences, take one or two young adults with autism on the race with you. You may already have someone in mind.

The sport of sailing can be an important mechanism for demonstrating to the world that many with autism can perform at high levels, in challenging conditions, if given the opportunity.

Bayview Yacht Club is proud to support Set Sail for Autism as a part of the 2014 Bell’s Beer Bayview Mackinac Yacht Race.

By PC Paul Latham, Port Huron Yacht Club

SET SAIL FOR AUTISM 2014 EVENTS
• Thursday July 10th, 7-10 pm: Pat Dailey Concert at Acheson Seaway Terminal – fun-loving music in a spectacular setting on the St. Clair River and prime viewing of fireworks.
• Wednesday July 11th, 5-10 pm: Boat Night Reception Vinomondo Wine Bar and Brew Pub. ASD families and guests experience Boat Night in a secure viewing area on the Black River, with private parking, Water Taxi Rides, food and refreshments.
• Saturday July 12th, Yacht Race start 9 am – noon: start of 2014 Bell’s Beer Bayview Mackinac Race. ASD families and guests experience the start of the race in a secure viewing area on the Black River with private parking, Water Taxi rides, food and refreshments.
• Monday July 13th: ASD Crew Members leave for Mackinac Island.
• Tuesday July 14th: ASD Crew Members participate in Awards Ceremony on Mackinac Island.
• Wednesday July 15th: yachts with ASD Crew Members depart Mackinac Island.
• Wednesday and Thursday night: stopover in designated ports.
• Friday July 17th: arrive back in Port Huron.

For information on Set Sail for Autism, yachts with ASD Crew Members, or Set Sail for Autism events, please contact:
Tom Riopelle 248-758-8770 email: mriopelle@comcast.net