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Making waves

Charles Ellery wants America's Cup in Santa Cruz

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There is no doubt that Charles Ellery has made waves in the local sailing community.

In the last six months, he has formed a what could be described as a non-elitist yacht club and become the chief organizer of the attempt to bring the America's Cup regatta to Santa Cruz.

But who is this Charles Ellery? A naive dreamer? A self-promoting opportunist? Or a doer who puts his ideas into action?

Whatever the case, Ellery has gotten results.

His Portola Sail Yacht Club boasts more than 200 members — growing at a rate now of about five new members per week — and he has gotten the support of the Santa Cruz City Council and U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta in his efforts to bring the America's Cup to Santa Cruz.

Ellery, 41, said he was an aerospace planner who retired in Southern California four years ago and moved to Santa Cruz. Here, he said, he has done various jobs in planning and promotion.

His motto, which he makes sure to include in any of the correspondence he prolifically sends out, is, "If you can dream it, you can do it."

Explaining how he decided to start his yacht club, Ellery said, "It has been my unpleasant experience in 33 years of sailing to see the sport becoming unaffordable for people."

A lifetime membership in Ellery's club in 1987 was \$15. In 1988, the fee rose to \$30. Anyone signing up automatically becomes a vice commodore — the second in command in the yachting club world.

"You don't have to have a boat to join," he said. "This club is for anyone who has a love for the sea and a yearning to be on the water. We don't do income screening or anything like that."

Nor is there a cap on the number of people who can join the club, as there is in most other yacht clubs.

For instance, it would take a person several years to make it through the waiting list to join the Santa Cruz Yacht Club, and then it would



Chip Scheuer

Charles Ellery's efforts to snare the American's Cup regatta have caused some uneasiness among the Santa Cruz sailing set.

cost \$500 for initiation and \$225 for annual dues.

"I've heard some give us the nickname for our acronym, PSYC, Poor Slobs Yacht Club," Ellery joked. "That's not really true."

Of course, other yacht clubs, such as Santa Cruz Yacht Club, have facilities such as a bar and restaurant, meeting rooms and showers.

The Portola Sail Yacht Club meets in a room at the Coast Guard Auxiliary building and has its social hours at the Crow's Nest. But Ellery said an official clubhouse will probably be in the works if the club keeps growing.

"We want to be accessible and affordable to everyone," Ellery said.

While Portola Sail Yacht Club was in its infant stage, New Zealand challenged the San Diego Yacht Club, the defender of the America's Cup, to a race between the two countries.

Although the America's Cup regatta is traditionally held every four years in a big extravaganza with several countries represented, a group of New Zealand sailors read between the fine lines of the America's Cup regulations and determined that the cup could be challenged in

any year.

The New Zealand challenge was upheld in the New York State Supreme Court in November, and so a race is planned for late summer or fall of 1988. San Diego, as the defender, doesn't have to reveal the location of the race until three months before the event.

Ellery saw all this as the perfect opportunity to bring Santa Cruz into the picture.

"I believe Santa Cruz has a 75 percent chance as being the site picked for the race," he said.

Some of Ellery's efforts have not sat well with some sailors in the area.

"I don't know if he is the one who should be heading the America's Cup drive," said one sailor who did not wish to be identified.

But no one from the more established Santa Cruz sailing set has stepped in to take the lead.

Ellery's yacht club has also caused a bit of a stir.

"There is probably room for another yacht club in the Monterey Bay area, but I'm not sure about his recruiting methods," said Kurt Hoffmann, former commodore of the Santa Cruz Yacht Club.

Hoffmann said he went to one of the meetings of the Portola Sail Yacht Club and found Ellery promising "reciprocal privileges" at other yacht clubs around the world to potential members.

Many yacht clubs do offer reciprocal privileges to members of other yacht clubs — one of the chief reasons to join a yacht club is so that, in cruising anywhere in the world, one can be assured of a berth, a restaurant and a shower.

But Hoffmann said that there is no guarantee of reciprocal privileges since each yacht club decides which other yacht clubs it will reciprocate with.

"He doesn't have anything to reciprocate with," Hoffmann said.

But Ellery wrote off Hoffmann's comments to sour grapes.

"We're bucking the long-established Santa Cruz Yacht Club in all of this," Ellery said. "We're a fledgling club, and we're bucking the good old boys."