

## GREATER TORONTO

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## Quiet confidence



TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR

Lorna Weekes, back, Morgan Biden, Jennifer Wong and Reina Archibald practise rowing along Toronto's Port lands.

## Rowing across the social divide

## Bayside club opens its oars to all walks of life

BY JENNIFER MORRISON  
STAFF REPORTER

Arthur Kalendjian races up and down the wooden dock outside the Bayside Rowing Club, anxiously awaiting his turn in the boat. He waves fervently at passing oarsmen only metres away, while carefully dodging the pigeon droppings.

Arthur wants to row.

Although he has only been in a rowboat three times prior to this sunny morning, the excitable 10-year-old loves the feeling of pulling the oars through the heavy water and sliding up and down on the slippery seat. It's a feeling like nothing he has ever experienced.

His hands are speaking a mile a minute as he describes it.

Arthur attends Toronto's Silent Voices sign language summer program for children who are deaf, hearing impaired or have deaf family members. He is deaf.

Using sign language,



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**OVATION:** Children from the Silent Voices program for the hearing impaired give coach Dominic Kahn, right, a hands-up cheer after a day on the water.

coach Dominic Kahn, also the club president, tries his best to instruct Arthur and the seven other campers on the nuts and bolts of the sport.

As Kahn stares down at the group of keen youngsters, his eyes sparkle. A rowing club that includes ev-

eryone, regardless of financial or physical barriers, is exactly what he envisioned when he revitalized Bayside nine years ago.

"My goal was to make rowing available to every kid. Rowing is not as diverse as it could be and that was the goal."

Including Bayside, originally founded in 1880, there are only four rowing clubs in the Toronto area. This stems primarily from the enormous cost of buying and maintaining boats and clubhouses. It has traditionally been a sport accessible only to the elite, such as private-school stu-

dents.

Finally, it is Arthur's turn to take to the water. All the rowing takes place in the heart of Toronto's port lands, running 2.3 kilometres from the foot of Leslie St. to the foot of Cherry St.

"Remember to watch the person in front of you, watch their shoulders. Pay attention," Kahn says, raising his hands to his head to illustrate what he's saying.

Arthur's wearing a bulging yellow life preserver fastened firmly around his small frame and a matching string bracelet on his wrist to indicate he's not a strong swimmer, in case he tumbles into the choppy ship-channel waters.

The wind has picked up considerably as his boat shoves off from the dock, making it tougher for coxswain Jordan Winick to steer a straight course.

No one seems to notice, especially not Arthur. Oversized blades slapping across the water, seats squeaking as the oarsmen work, the four rowers in the boat may not have the best technique, but judging by the jocular laugh-

Turn Over →

# Pulling hard to include all kids

ter; everyone's having a great time.

Coach Kahn stands on the dock, hands on hips, watching intently as Arthur's boat rows by.

"I feel such a great sense of pride," he says. "What we've done is so unique and different and to see these kids that wouldn't normally have a chance to row actually rowing is amazing."

Under Kahn's leadership, the club operates by three principles: To promote the sport to everyone across the city, free of prejudice; to encourage and assist members in both recreational and competitive rowing; and to reach out to those who wouldn't normally have access to the sport, such as underprivileged young people, visible minorities and those with physical disabilities.

The club has gone a long way toward reaching those goals. It has more than 1,700 members from across the city, including young people from 18 elementary and high schools, making it one of the largest clubs in Canada.

Bayside's youth program, which emphasizes teamwork among members from all types of backgrounds, is called TRY: Toronto Rowing for Youth.

Kahn believes rowing is one of the few sports where athletes learn to rely on each other and work together as a team.

"Most kids today say it's all about me. But in rowing, it's all about we."

For instance, if one athlete is late for practice, the entire boat



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**IN SYNC:** Arthur Kalendjian glides across the water at the Bayside Rowing Club, which gives children of all backgrounds and abilities a chance to try the sport.

is grounded. If one oarsman is not pulling as hard as the rest of the crew, the whole boat slows down.

Kahn believes kids will love the sport and want to keep going with it, once they get a chance to try it. That's how it worked with the Silent Voices campers.

"They were all asking to come for more lessons. That's very rewarding," he says.

A former national champion, Kahn, 35, had been rowing since he was 10, and coaching since he was 18. He's also coached a couple of winning athletes, including Olympic bronze medallist and three-time world champion Emma

Robinson.

Peggy Hyslop, 22, is one of the club's most promising athletes, finishing eighth last month in a Canadian national trial. All of the women who finished ahead of her are national team athletes, Kahn says proudly.

Hyslop didn't go to private school or university but has taken up the sport on her own and found a home at Bayside.

She's almost always down at the club at 7 a.m., training with a group of diehard competitive rowers, most of whom are women. They train up to three times a day, every day except Sunday.

Many of the competitive row-

ers, including Hyslop, are also Bayside employees, helping out during the day with boat maintenance and office work, and at night as coaches instructing corporate rowers.

More than 1,000 adults participate in a corporate learn-to-row program throughout the summer. They learn the basics of the sport, rowing once a week for eight weeks. Each participant pays \$185 for the program, which helps fund the club's competitive athletes and inner-city outreach programs.

Like the competitive rowers, the corporate rowers also get a chance to showcase their talents, with their season culminating in a regatta in August.

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