

Foil windsurfers train in Stevenson for 2024 Olympics

By Philip L. Watness
The Pioneer

The dozen bright orange windsurfing sails made an impressive display for spectators at the Stevenson waterfront over the past week as members of the U.S. Sailing Association’s Windsurfing Foil Olympics Development Team trained for the 2024 Olympics.

The wind-foilers rode their boards above the Columbia River, lifted by the foils which allowed them to cut through the water like butter at speeds unattainable by traditional windsurfing gear.

The consistent winds and fresh water in the gorge provided ideal conditions for the participants to practice their wind-foil skills. They launched from Bob’s Beach at the Port of Skamania County where local windsurfers welcomed them and inquired



Members of the U.S. Sailing Association’s Windsurfing Foil Olympics Development Team practice on the Columbia River on Thursday, July 22, in Stevenson. Photo by Philip L. Watness

about the newest version of windsurfing.

Development team members hail from Hawaii, Florida, California, Texas and Oregon. Colson Zack and Fiona

Wylde of Hood River were among the dozen youth practicing here. Zach competes for the Sailworks team of Hood River while Wylde competes for the Starboard team.

Some of the dozen or more wind-foilers in Stevenson will compete in Marseilles, France, during the 2024 Olympics in Paris for the first time in the history of the games.

Windsurfing has been around since the late 1960s but came into its own in the 1980s, particularly in the Columbia River Gorge. The addition of a foil to the board is a more recent development. A February 2020 post on the Sailing World website states that “The first Formula Windsurfing Foil World Championships were held in 2018, and in the United States, only small pockets of board heads in the Chesapeake Bay, Florida and the Columbia River Gorge in Oregon are using foils.”

The sport has grown considerably over the past few years, particularly in Europe, leading to the decision by the International Olympics Committee to add wind-foil competitions for the 2024 games.

Several of the young athletes who trained here last week said they switched from

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Affordable housing is out of reach for many residents

By Philip L. Watness
The Pioneer

The availability of affordable housing continues to decrease as the real estate market heats up. About two-thirds of people who are low-income renters can’t find affordable housing, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) of Washington, D.C.

“Only 37 affordable and available rental homes exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households,” according to the NLIHC website. “Extremely low-income renters face a shortage in every state and major metropolitan area, including the District of Columbia.”

The coalition estimates

that the U.S. has a shortage of 6.8 million rental homes affordable and available to extremely low-income renters, whose household incomes are at or below the poverty guideline or 30 percent of their area median income.

That’s not news for low-income renters living in the Columbia River Gorge who have long endured a deficit in the amount of affordable housing. The situation isn’t much better for people who work full-time but don’t earn enough to qualify for a home mortgage. With housing prices jumping dramatically over the past few months, many folks have been priced out of the mortgage market.

An affordable housing

needs assessment in 2015 by the Washington State Department of Commerce found that 36 percent of households (936,260) were spending more than 50 percent of their income on rent. They are considered “cost-burdened” because they spend more than a third of their income for shelter.

The 2015 report adds that “Since 2000, incomes in the state have declined by 2.4 percent but median rents have increased 7.8 percent in real dollars. This means that housing affordability in the state has been a growing problem over the past decade.”

The Association of Washington Housing Authorities puts the situation in starker

terms: “Since 2014, rent in Washington has gone up 42 percent, in the same time wages went up only 23 percent. This is not sustainable. Washington’s minimum wage is \$11.50 an hour, but to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Washington, an individual needs to make \$26.87 an hour, or work 93 hours per week at a minimum wage job.”

The AWH reports that its members have only enough public housing for about one-quarter of people who qualify for housing subsidies. “As a result, families wait an average of 3.5 years to be accepted into public housing,” its website states.

Agencies which support low-income residents in the

Columbia River Gorge hosted an informational session on Wednesday, July 14, to familiarize people with the increasingly dire situation. The Washington Gorge Action Programs (WAGAP), the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority (MCHA) and the Mid-Columbia Community Action Council (MCCAC) organized the first roundtable which was attended by more than 100 people.

Panelists presented information on how the lack of affordable housing is impacting their clients and advocated for policies and strategies to address the issue.

Adria Buchanan, executive director for the non-profit

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LDB weathers supply line issues as business transforms

By Philip L. Watness
The Pioneer

Aluminum cans have come into their own during the novel coronavirus pandemic as beverage producers have migrated to the containers as consumers’ preferences have changed over the past year and a quarter.

That’s been good news for LDB Beverages of Stevenson which installed a canning line two years ago. The move to cans was initiated, in part, to reduce water usage in response to higher water and sewer rates for industrial beverage producers in the City of Stevenson. LDB co-owner Bruce Nissen said at the time that more products would be put in cans and less wastewater would be produced.

One major limiting factor, though, is that because so many beverage makers are now canning rather than bottling products, securing aluminum cans has been a major issue.

“The biggest challenges for the business are material availability,” he said. “There’s a global shortage of aluminum right now.”

That has led Nissen to telling potential customers that they need to have a supply of aluminum cans and other materials.

“There’s also a big sugar shortage,” he said. “That seems odd to me because sugar grows in the ground.”

He said the situation may be due to a nationwide shortage of truck drivers to haul materials to producers and product from them.

“There’s just enough wheels to put under the loads,” Nissen said. “It’s almost like a bidding frenzy to get somebody to come pick up your load. In our case, that results in can loads coming in late because they lost the truck they thought they had. It really does hurt us because ours is a very specific rhythmic dance that we do.”

Any delays in shipping cause downwind problems, though, because LDB is scheduling clients to produce their products. If one company has to cut its planned production order, that could mean LDB has workers with little to do.

“We’re trying to figure out how we can best manage the instability of the infrastructure,” he said. “Everything has to flow like a river. All this disruption in the supply chain has really driven us crazy, so we’re trying to adjust.”

While the supply line issues are “collateral damage” due to COVID-19, the business has been fortunate that no employee has been diagnosed with the potentially deadly disease.

“We have had people who were exposed to somebody with COVID and we had a lot of people who had to seques-



Workers at LDB Beverages in Stevenson operate one of the two canning lines which reduces the amount of waste water discarded down the drains. Pioneer archive photo provided by LDB Beverages

ter themselves because of that, but I don’t believe we’ve had an actual case of COVID in the plant,” he said.

The shift to canning proved prescient. When LDB started up in 2015, 90 percent of the business was in bottling with just 10 percent in canning. The mix soon swapped to be about 85 percent cans and 15 percent bottles.

“We haven’t had a single request to bottle this year,” he said. “The question now is ‘Where is it going next?’”

The company also recently upped its game by securing a Safe Quality Food certification from the Food Safety Association.

“SQF certification show-

cases certified sites’ commitment to a culture of food safety and operational excellence in food safety management,” a post on the website for the Safe Quality Food Institute states. SQFI is a division of the food safety association.

Nissen said his wife, Carrie, led the effort to secure the certification for LDB. He said the business began the effort a few years ago.

“It substantially enlarges the number of people we can work with,” Nissen said. “Because of our SQF certification, what’s happening is the kinds of clients who want to work with us are changing, and they’re changing for the better. About half of our volume

is working with a Fortune 500 company in the beverage industry based in Florida. They’d take 100 percent of our volume if we’d let them but I don’t want to put all my eggs in one basket.”

He said LDB plans to can kombucha for a large beverage maker and has also produced non-alcohol sparkling seltzer water for a national company. The bigger orders allow the company to reduce the set-up time needed to swap from one product to another, Nissen said.

LDB Beverages has been running full steam over the past year and now employs 46 people who staff four shifts

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News Briefs

Firefighters battle fire in west end

Several fire districts and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources responded to a wildfire at 7:14 p.m., Sunday, July 18, on Franz Road in the west end of Skamania County.

Skamania County Fire Districts No. 1, 4 and 5, North Bonneville Fire and DNR responded to the wildfire. DNR brought three engines and called for air support.

Volunteers controlled the traffic at the west end of Franz Road and alerted nearby residences of the wildland fire threat. DNR issued a Level 1 evacuation notice for the area but the fire was brought under control and command handed over to DNR at 10:15 p.m.

Searchers locate deceased hiker

Skamania County Search and Rescue was called out to search for a missing U.S. Army member at 3:47 a.m., Tuesday, July 20, at Mount St. Helens.

First Lt. Brian Yang of Joint Base Lewis-McChord failed to arrive for duty on Monday, July 19, prompting the request for assistance.

Yang’s body was found Wednesday, July 21, and he appears to have fallen to his death 200 feet down a steep embankment in the Mount Wittier area.

The Cowlitz County Sheriff’s Office said hikers called 911 to report finding his body.

At 5:02 a.m., Tuesday, July 20, Yang’s vehicle was reported to have been found at the Coldwater trail.

The Volcano Rescue Team and Skamania SAR provided 20 ground searchers while the Army sent several dozen soldiers.

The Fort Lewis Special Forces Mountain Recovery Team recovered Yang’s body and at 8:31 p.m., July 21, a mortuary collected it.

Four helicopters and 241 searchers participated in the search effort.

Campfires banned in state lands

Campfire bans were implemented for all Washington State Parks and state DNR lands on Friday, July 2. The ban includes all wood fires and charcoal briquettes. The use of gas/propane self-contained camping stoves and portable gas/propane firepits are permitted in designated state park camping and picnic sites.

Skamania County bans all outdoor fires, including campfires

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This day in history

On July 28, 1868, the 14th Amendment establishes African American citizenship.

In 1932, President Herbert Hoover orders the eviction of World War I veterans in Washington, D.C.

In 1935, the Boeing B-17 makes its maiden flight.

In 1965, President Johnson increases the number of troops in South Vietnam.

In 1984, the summer Olympics open in Los Angeles.

In 1996, the remains of the prehistoric “Kennewick Man” are discovered.

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traditional sailing to wind-foil sailing because the latter offers a more exhilarating experience. The restrictions surrounding COVID-19 also factored into their decision to train for the Olympics three years from now.

Danicka Sailer, 17, of Kailua, Hawaii, said she decided to switch from sailboating to foil windsurfing when health safety restrictions in the spring of 2020 meant practices and competitions for her high school sailing club were curtailed or cancelled. Wind-foiling also proved to be more exciting and fun that traditional sailing.

“Windsurfing is still connected to the water but it’s much more physical,” Sailer said. “When sailing, you’re sitting down. And, you go a lot faster.”

Before she could practice and compete, though, she had to get her own wind-foil, but she had to wait a year to have her gear delivered due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Getting into wind-foiling, though, is costly. The Starboard iQFoil selected by the Olympics Committee costs about \$10,000. The cost of traveling to competitions and practices increases her investment by thousands of dollars. The team travels all over the world, too. She has been to New Zealand, Long Beach, Calif., Florida and elsewhere in her pursuit of her Olympic dreams.

She hopes her efforts result

in her qualifying for the first-ever wind-foil competition at the Olympics in 2024.

Sailer said the winds in the gorge provide ample opportunity to refine her skills.

“The gorge is a lot better (than the ocean waters of Long Beach),” she said. “It’s prettier and there aren’t any stingrays. I’ve never sailed this much but I handled it much better than I thought.”

Another positive feature of the river is that the water is less turbulent than wind-foiling on ocean waves.

Competitions pit more than a dozen foil windsurfers against each other in three main types of races: An up/downwind course, a slalom course, and a marathon up/downwind course.

Foil sailors compete in men’s, women’s and youth categories. The women use an 86-square-foot sail while the men compete with a 96-square-foot sail.

Calum McDonald, 14, also from Kailua, said that when his high school cancelled soccer matches due to COVID-19, he took up wind-foiling. His father, Tom, had windsurfed so he was familiar with the sport. He said the camaraderie of the windsurfing community is one aspect he values along with the thrill of wind-foiling.

“Just the feeling of going fast is a real attraction,” he said. “It’s also very technical with both the sail and the board.”

He also lauded the windy conditions of the gorge.

“It’s windier than Maui and I like the flat water which makes it really nice to foil,” he said. “I feel going upwind is easier without the ocean currents.”

He said foil windsurfing is much more popular – and more organized – in Europe.

The sport demands physical exertion as well as technical know-how, McDonald said. The sails and boards can be adjusted for the conditions, he explained. For instance, the curve of the sail can be flattened or increased as needed.

Ethan Froelich, 18, of Austin, Texas, also recently took up foil windsurfing. Like Sailer, he had been racing sailboats in high school but likes that wind-foils are easier to transport, and quicker to get out on the water.

“I always look forward to wind-foiling,” he said. “Sailing is much slower but you get an adrenaline rush from foiling.”

He windsurfs on Lake Travis in Austin where the winds are less consistent than on the Columbia River. He said the wind mind only rise to 30 knots an hour about once in a month.

“It’s nice to have consistent, heavy winds to practice in,” McDonald said. “I’ve never been in this much wind before.”

B Lindsay, 21, of West Palm Beach, Fla., said COVID-19 also prompted her to



Floridian B Lindsay, left, and Danicka Sailer and Calum McDonald from Hawaii, members of the U.S. Sailing Association’s Windsurfing Foil Olympics Development Team, converse before practicing on the Columbia River on Thursday, July 22, in Stevenson. Photo by Philip L. Watness

take up foil windsurfing. She said she’s the newest member of the development team. She had been studying statistics and data science at Yale University in New Haven, Conn., but was sent home in the spring of 2020. She also had sailed boats since she was 6 years old, including as a member of the Yale sailing team, but has found wind-foiling more challenging.

“I really appreciate the ease of it,” she said. “It takes 10 minutes to rig the equipment and then you get to go racing. I didn’t realize how athletic it was, though.”

Riding a windsurf foil requires quick responses, she said.

“You have to be thinking three steps ahead,” Lindsay said. “It’s a lot more about instinct.”

Like Froelich, she said the consistent wind here means

she can spend a lot more time on the water than she can back home in Florida.

“It’s way breezier here but its consistent,” she said. “In Florida, storms come up at 3 p.m. but here, you always have the breeze. It’s a real treat. It’s challenging, but in a good way.”

The weeklong practices helped improve the technique for “depowering” the wind – adjusting the sail so it isn’t “holding the wind up.”

“It’s important to handle the wind,” she said. “It’s like taking your foot off the gas.”

Caroll-Ann Alie of Seattle convinced the U.S. Sailing Association to support bringing the Olympic hopefuls to the gorge for the weeklong practices. She competed in windsurfing at the 1992, 1996 and 2000 Summer Olympics, and is a three-time World Windsurfing Champion.

She windsurfed on the Columbia River as far back as the mid-1980s, so she knew the windy conditions would be great for the development team members to practice foil windsurfing.

“I’m giving back to the sport that did so much for me,” she said. Her hope is to bring more clinics here for Olympic hopefuls in other categories of water sports.

She said windsurfing is like playing chess because the rider has to constantly adjust to the conditions. She said the sport requires the participants to be engineers, meteorologists and tacticians.

The team travels to San Francisco Bay for the U.S. Open Series, Aug. 13-15. They will also compete in the North American iQFoil series as well as numerous other events in the U.S. and around the globe.

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– two shifts that run 10 hours a day, four days a week, one 12-hour shift that operates Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and a fourth maintenance shift which runs throughout the week.

“This gives us the opportunity to bring more product through the building,” he said.

LDB also hires employees who live in the region as much as possible. Several Stevenson High School graduates have joined the company in recent months, including Braeden Waymire of Stabler who works as an inventory

specialist.

The fact that 46 people are earning wages at LDB means “We’re really adding some weight to the communities,” Nissen said. “About 24 of those jobs are living wage jobs.”

He said the company’s work culture has meant former employees have sought to return to work for LDB.

“I think the word has kind of flooded out there that the culture (here) is evolving and we’re really investing a lot of time in people,” he said. “I think that’s had a positive im-

pact on the labor pool.”

Nissen said the company has changed its employment structure, as well, opting to have five team leaders to manage production rather than just one production manager overseeing all the other line workers. He said the company also has a dedicated human resources employee which has meant issues with employees are handled by that person rather than the production managers.

“One of our core values is we promote people from within our building and try to train

them,” he said. That includes his own son, Nick, who was promoted to run one of the shifts. Nissen said he asked the line workers who should be hired for the position, and the answer was overwhelmingly that LDB should promote Nick Nissen.

“It’s fun to watch people develop,” he said. “It’s going to be fun to watch a lot of these folks from the community spread their wings.”

LDB’s growth means it may run out of space in the River Point Building on the Stevenson waterfront. It leases the building from the Port of Skamania County which

plans to develop the Cascade Business Park in North Bonnevile.

“If we could have something built for us that makes sense for our business ... I think we would enjoy that,” he said. “If not, we know that we are probably at about 70 percent of our capacity in our current building. We’ll probably push that to 90 percent and it will be a good business but it just won’t be able to grow anymore.”

LDB has postponed its plans to open a tasting room at the waterfront facility due the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. Renovation of the build-

ing was well underway last March when the pandemic ramped up but Nissen said the company decided to focus on operational effectiveness.

“It is our hope that within the next two or three months, we will realize that with the changes we made in the structure of the support staff, that we will have the bandwidth to open back up,” he said. “I have great plans for it. It will have the best Memphis barbecue this side of the Mississippi.”

For now, though, Nissen said he is focused on the core of the business – packaging products for others.

Senior Menus

North Bonneville Senior Center

The North Bonneville Senior Center resumes its meal program on Tuesday, Aug. 3. New rules and guidelines which follow guidance from the CDC and the Skamania County Community Health Department will be followed to protect people’s health. Seniors will need to use hand sanitizer at the front desk before signing in. Masks are not required if an individual is fully vaccinated. Those

not vaccinated need to wear a mask except when eating.

If someone feels at all sick, they should not come to the meal site.

The senior center is open 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays.

People who wish to have a meal need to make a reservation by 9 a.m. by calling 427-5234. Meals are \$5 for non-members and \$4 per meal for members (50 years and older). Membership is \$5 a year.

Menu:

Tuesday, August 3,

Clam Chowder

Thursday, August 5,

Taco Bake

Tuesday, August 10, Meatloaf (Birthday Lunch)

Thursday, August 12,

BBQ Pork

Tuesday, August 17,

Baked Chicken

Thursday, August 19,

Chicken Fried Steak

Tuesday, August 24,

Turkey Club

Thursday, August 26,

Spaghetti w/Meat Sauce

Tuesday, August 31,

Sweet & Sour Chicken



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Support Groups

<p>Carson AA Spirit of the Gorge</p> <p>Carson Hot Springs old hotel, 372 St. Martin’s Road, Carson.</p> <p>Meetings are held 7-8 p.m., Sundays and Wednesdays</p> <p><i>For more information, call (509) 427-4347</i></p>	<p>Stevenson AA Group</p> <p>Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, 161 Lutheran Church Road, Stevenson</p> <p>Meetings are held 6-7 p.m., Thursdays</p> <p><i>For more information, call (971) 678-1688</i></p>	<p>Stevenson Al-Anon</p> <p>Stevenson United Methodist Church, 35 NW Jefferson St.</p> <p>Meetings are held 6-7 p.m., Tuesdays</p> <p><i>For more information, call (503) 803-3012 or (509) 637-0074</i></p>
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Fundraiser of the month

Stevenson Eagles Surf and Turf Dinner

Members and guests of the Stevenson Eagles Aerie No. 1744 enjoyed steak, prawns and halibut on Friday, July 23, with proceeds benefitting an effort to purchase new dinner plates for the organization.

Diners enjoyed flat-iron steak, halibut from Pike’s Place Market in Seattle, wild-caught prawns, baked red potatoes and fried asparagus prepared by Mick Schneider, Scott Anderson, Milo Balzer, Jim LaCrosse and Sally Drew. Drew’s homemade Béarnaise sauce added zest to the meal.

More than three dozen diners helped the aerie raise funds to replace the decades-old plates that have outlived their useful life.

For more information or to donate to the dinner plate replacement fund, call the aerie at (509) 427-5255.



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