

Gato Verde Adventure Sailing

Many locals know about an inlet near Georgia Pacific's pulp mill site in front of Maritime Heritage Park where seals like to swim and bask in the sun. Little heads bob and dip, playfully popping out of the murky depths of the waterway from time to time, eventually flopping up onto the log floats for a relaxing solar recharge. It's a uniquely appealing place and a particular favorite in Bellingham Bay for Captain Todd Shuster, owner of Gato Verde Adventure Sailing.

"I love getting people out on the water, seeing the local wildlife and harnessing the wind, showing them how it can move us around," he explains. "And those places where industry meets nature are so interesting – from the water you can really see the remains of past industrial booms in the cannery & logging eras, such areas of transition."

So new this season, Todd will begin offering Industrial Ecology cruises to points of interest around the San Juan Islands and Puget Sound. Industrial Ecology cruises are about the interface between industry and nature, those poignant places where human industry has left its mark on the waterfront. Places like, Georgia Pacific, Cherry Point, and sites in and around Anacortes.

You may be thinking yourself, 'Okey dokey – I'd love to sail around all day too. What's so special about this guy?' I'll tell you. Todd first learned to sail at summer camp when he was 9 years old, by age 12 knew he wanted to be a professional sailor, and started teaching when he was only 15. He's a US Coast Guard licensed Captain, a USSAILING instructor and instructor trainer. He has taught wilderness sailing courses in Baja, Mexico for The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), and has run several sailing programs for universities, yacht clubs, and summer camps. But even more inspiring than his qualifications – Todd truly cares about the marine environment and loves sharing his appreciation and knowledge with others.

In fact, Gato Verde Adventure Sailing is about much more than sailing the open seas. When it comes to being a sustainable business their names says it all – 'Green' for environmental stewardship and 'Cat' because it's a 42-foot catamaran. Having recently joined Sustainable Connections and taken the Whatcom Watershed Business Pledge, Gato Verde has always tried to model environmental stewardship and community living by not only following and teaching principles set forth by the National Clean Boating and Leave No Trace campaigns, but by primarily using the cleanest fuel there is – wind. The catamaran's sails are optimized for light wind to keep her sailing when others have started their engines. And when the wind does die and the engines need to be started, they run with biodiesel that is renewable, burns cleaner, and minimizes wear on the engines themselves.

One dream Todd has harbored a long time has been a plug-in bio-diesel/electric hybrid boat, "like a Prius, only better, because you can top off the battery at night from the grid and don't need to run the internal combustion engine to recharge it." Although Todd's been seriously considering electric propulsion since 1997, the technology and cost-benefits weren't where they needed to be for him to move forward with the project until now, and this spring Gato Verde Adventure Sailing will be the first charter boat on the West Coast to run with hybrid technology!

Gato Verde is based in Bellingham, Washington at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal in Fairhaven. Offerings range from carefree skippered charters and customized

educational charters to research expeditions. Trips can run from two hours to seven days in length. For more information, and to schedule whatever floats *your* boat, visit www.gatoverde.com.

Cathy Lehman is the Events and Program Coordinator for Sustainable Connections, a business network in NW Washington establishing and supporting a local living economy that sustains itself, our community, and a healthy environment – now with almost 500 members! Learn more about their programs and how you can join by visiting www.sconnect.org.