

The Oshkosh Yacht Club was organized in 1869 when lake schooners and cutters sought to add formality to what had been up to that point informal competition between commercial vessels on the lake. Rules were adopted and a system to handicap yachts was agreed to. Summer regattas were organized with yachts invited to compete from other cities on the lake or other inland lakes. The regattas became the social events of the summer. Much civic pride was demonstrated by area newspapers and those who crowded onto steamboats to witness the competition on Lake Winnebago.

Frank Gates and other members played a part in the development of the racing scow in the late 1890's and into the early 1900's. The OYC is a founding and charter member of the Inland Lake Yachting Association established in August of 1897. The club has continued to sail scows to the present. The classes currently sailing in OYC sanctioned races include Class A, E, 420, X, IOD, and Laser.

In 1903 the city of Oshkosh buzzed with excitement over a crown jewel, the Oshkosh Yacht Club. Designed by the great architect the ILYA Championship Regatta, the magnificent building was erected by area craftsmen in three short months. It opened two days before the start of the 1903 Inland Championship and was regarded as the finest club house to be found in the Midwest. Sailors and their families from throughout the United States came her to enjoy Inland Lake Yachting Association events season after sailing season. When cold autumn winds began to blow, she was closed; awaiting arrival of the next summer and the sailing that would take place.



The building was lost to the city of Oshkosh twice for failure to pay property taxes during periods of wars, waning interest and hard financial times. The city sold it to American Legion Post 70 who owned and maintained the property as their club house until 2007.

During the years when the OYC had no formal home, the Oshkosh Yacht Club used Menominee Park as a hub of operations. In the latter third of the last century, OYC activity returned to the American Legion property, where we have been ever since. We have rented the harbor, used the lawn on sailing days and centered our social activities over the years. In 1997, the club house was used as the center for all night time entertainment during the ILYA Centennial Regatta. A tent erected on the lawn rocked as sailors and their families danced the night away to the tunes of Vince Vance and the Valiants among other bands. Year to year leases for decades, have had generations of Oshkosh sailors longing for a homecoming, with dreams of buying the OYC building back, imaginings of what could be done to enlarge and enhance the harbor if we only had a right to do so.

That dream became a reality in 2008

Today the best of all options. Purchased in 2008 by yacht club members, and renamed 'The Waters,' the original Yacht Club building was returned to her original state of grandeur, with all of the modern amenities required of such a building. The Waters primary use will be that of a premiere event facility.

The OYC has signed a very affordable 50-year lease with The Waters for the harbor and the harbor-side terrace where a Sailing Center has been built. A separate 50-year lease was signed, for sailing season use of the Oshkosh Yacht Club, in The Water's lower level's meeting and instructional space. Committees are in place to continue on in the pursuit of our mission of promoting youth sailing and water safety, enhancing our prevalent historical legacy of competitive sailing, keeping sailing affordable for families in the Oshkosh area, and creating a warm home for the OYC family to return to for the next 50 years – being at the core of our endeavor.

The OYC Homecoming Campaign was born to pursue that dream. In 2008 yacht club members and sailing enthusiasts raised the funds necessary to expand the harbor to allow our youth sailing program to move to The Waters from Miller's Bay. The expansion also allows the possibility of social members coming via boat to the club's open hours and social events.

Building on the past to create a bright future. The face of the future is the face of our youth. With our continued emphasis on youth sailing, water safety, and the OYC Sailing School, we grow many sailors. But, perhaps it is more important that we help youth to gain other skills. Youth participation promotes water safety, self-confidence, social skills, sportsmanship, and quick decision-making. When the kids show up to sail, they are 'unplugged,' as MP3 players, Game boys, and cell phones aren't convenient or useful out on the lake. Over 700 youth sailors have been a part of the OYC Sailing School over the last 25 years, and more than 75 adult students have learned to sail through the Sailing School, too.

The Oshkosh Yacht Club Today

The OYC is not a group of haughty blue blazer clad yachtsmen. Members are smattered throughout the Oshkosh area, and represent all socio-economic levels. The common denominator among us is the love of competitive sailing and our beautiful lake. Together, we share with the youth of 'Oshkosh on the Water' the many aspects of competitive sailing, respect for the water, safety, and positive social interaction.

