

The Fire - Can the Hudson Sloop Club Rebuild?

On the morning of Wednesday, January 18th, at five am, members of the Hudson Sloop Club were notified that the Riverloft building in the North Bay area of Hudson, NY was burning. The building, which was recently donated to their sister organization, Kite's Nest, housed all of the Sloop Club's materials and supplies. Fortunately, the club's larger boats that live on trailers were outside and subsequently spared. The fire destroyed the entire building and everything in it. The building was completely demolished by the end of the day. The Hudson Sloop Club suffered deep, material losses, but luckily no one was harmed, and no lives were lost in the fire.

For those not familiar with the Hudson Sloop Club, the group was founded in 2012 and, operates as a public cooperative to provide river access and education to community of Hudson and the surrounding areas. Since their inception, they have offered the community opportunities for recreation and education on and about the Hudson River, through boating trips, community sailing days, summer camps, and waterfront programming.

The Club started with a group of concerned citizens who found themselves wanting to get on the River but not knowing how to access it even though their City was founded in its name and thrived as a maritime port. These citizens quest to become educated and experienced led to the formation of the Club. The group chose to name themselves after the Sloop Clubs developed by Pete Seeger and his dream of reengaging the Hudson Valley with its namesake river.

The Hudson Sloop Club has operated under the belief that if members of the community are given the opportunity to enjoy, learn about and engage with the river, they will be able to build a relationship, a connection to the River, and perhaps become the natural stewards this river and environmental resource deserves.

In just four short years the Hudson Sloop Club has become an integral part of the community, partnering with local organizations and offering a variety of free programming to children and adults from all walks of life. Some of the many offerings include: free after-school workshops in boat building at the local Intermediary School, where 5th and 6th graders build traditional and experimental boats. Free fishing trips both on the river and to local ponds and streams for the community. Other workshops have focused on seamanship, sailing, the river's ecology, history, and goals for future protection and public policy.

In 2016 The Club, in partnership City of Hudson with was awarded \$91,780 from the Hudson River Estuary Program to develop a community education center at the Hudson

Riverfront. This grant will fund the building and development of the Everett Nack Estuary Education Center in Hudson, named in memory of Everett Nack, a local fisherman, naturalist, and advocate for the river. The site for the ENEEC is an acre of Hudson River frontage with the remnants of an historic pier and slips, directly south of Rick's Point and the Hudson Waterfront Park. The Hudson Sloop Club will be administering the project for the City of Hudson and running the facility with partner organizations once the project is complete.

The Club has operated four years on a shoestring budget, accomplishing all of its amazing work with volunteers. When the Riverloft fire consumed the bulk of the Club's materials there were serious concerns that the organization could not continue. So much time, effort and goodwill had been put into the dozens of boats built in workshops, summer camps and after school classes that were now just ashes. With no current paid positions, the organization had been run as a cooperative with community members pitching in to help whenever and wherever they could, but without a developed organizational structure.

After a series of difficult meetings with the Club's core "steering committee," it was decided that the Hudson Sloop Club would push forward and attempt to see their dreams become reality. The Club will be launching a capital campaign to try and raise the necessary funds to get the group back up and running. In addition to replacing items lost in fire, the Sloop Club will be raising money to establish its first paid positions (and hire a new director) to help create a more sustainable and resilient organization to carry the group forward.

The Sloop Club is hoping to raise \$75,000 through the campaign, which they are calling the Fire Fund. The campaign will include a web based crowd funding component to allow anyone who wants to help get the Club back on the water donate easily and quickly from their computer or phone. The campaign will also include a series of events to showcase the work that the club has done over the past four years and highlight the need for support through this difficult time. For information about the Fire Fund and other fundraising events, go to the Club's website at Hudsonsloopclub.org

If all goes according to plan, and the Fire Fund campaign is a success you can look forward to seeing the Hudson Sloop Club back on the river this summer. The club hopes to not only offer its annual program of classes, workshops and camps, but is looking forward to adding a new Kayak and Paddle-boarding program featuring classes, excursions and rentals on the Hudson this season. Also look out for the Hudson waterfront to start seeing the first stages of construction of the Nack Center this summer and fall.



Hudson Sloop Club Before the Fire

