



*This Crew Classic History is presented with apologies to the many individuals who contributed to the Crew Classic over the years and are not credited here for their unfailing support of the Crew Classic.*

*This was written with a focus on the vision of the two major co-founders of the Crew Classic: Patty Wyatt and Joe Jessop, Sr. Information was gathered from personal interviews with family members and friends of Patty Wyatt.*

*Special thanks to Patty's daughter Laurie Wyatt Driscoll, Marilyn Patten Wyatt (Patty's Daughter-in-Law), and Martha Shumaker who grew up across the street, for their personal insights about Patty's vision of a Classic regatta in San Diego.*

*Additional information was pulled from the many history articles printed in past Crew Classic Programs with final edits by Martha Shumaker.*

*Susan Rezner,  
Trustee, SDCC Foundation*

## Founding a Classic

Rowing began in the United States with the Yale vs Harvard race in 1852. Not surprisingly, the elite Ivy League schools dominated the Collegiate Championships until the late 1970's.

The story of the San Diego Crew Classic begins in the late 1960s. Regattas, such as the San Diego Invitational and Pacific Coast Championship, were already being conducted in San Diego, but Patricia (Patty) Stose Wyatt thought they might be improved to create a more positive experience for young rowers. Laurie Wyatt, Patty's daughter, said her brother Duke Robinson fondly recalled seeing his mother standing on the shoreline at various regattas talking to herself saying, "We could do that better."

Patty Wyatt's energy and love of the sport was pivotal in bringing the Crew Classic to fruition. Along with her fellow members at ZLAC Rowing Club, the oldest women's rowing club in the world, she had already successfully hosted two local regattas, "Rowing is Growing" and "Knowing Rowing" in 1968 and 1969 respectively. The amateur sport of Rowing had not been given much attention at that time in the local sporting pages, but the social aspects of the luncheons held in conjunction with these two regattas landed them in the society pages of the local papers. Patty's skills at choreographing well-run events were drawing the attention of regatta organizers, and Patty found herself being invited to organize events for others up and down the coast.

"I think we can do it!"

The early 70's found Patty sitting at the dinner table with her family at their home in Point Loma when she announced, "I think we can do it!" The rest of that meal and many more were spent discussing her interest in putting on a spring regatta that ran smoothly, on time and was focused on the rowers. She had already proved that she could put on a regatta but her vision was to bring in the broader community. To do that she sought to involve others who had deep community ties and connections to potential funders.

Patty found a fellow enthusiast in the form of Joe Jessop, Sr. a renowned local yachtsman. Aiming to build on the success of the local regattas of the time, Patty and Joe decided to pool their diverse talents and gathered an exceptional team to realize their vision of a quality rowing event for athletes and spectators in San Diego. When Joe asked Patty what she needed from him, they agreed that he should use his extensive connections to get the right folks involved on the Steering Committee. This influential committee would serve as the development committee to raise the funds for their \$10,000 budget and served as a model for funding future regattas.

Although the University of Washington was well recognized as a rowing powerhouse, the reputation of California rowing programs was still developing at that time. Key to the early success of the Crew Classic would be an effort to establish an East meets West showdown. Patty had already caught the attention of Coach Dick Erickson at the University of Washington as a developer of successful regattas. When she called the coach to inquire if he would bring his crew to a regatta in San Diego, he expressed some interest. However, Coach Erickson felt his team needed to have some real competition to make it worthwhile.

Patty learned that the head of the athletic department at the United States Naval Academy happened to be a classmate of her brother-in-law Captain John J. Flachsenhar, USN Ret. She called using Flash's name and found they would love to give Washington a challenge, but would need the support of the top brass. Enter Joe Jessop, Sr. Joe had long believed that the US Naval Academy needed to participate in a local regatta. After all, San Diego was a Navy town.

Joe's political push with the Navy Vice Admiral Thomas J. Walker, Commander Naval Air Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet, and Rear Admiral Joseph W. Williams, Jr. Commandant 11th Naval District, was a deciding factor in making it possible for the U.S. Naval Academy to participate. While other civic minded San Diegans also pressed for these challengers to participate, the combined efforts made by Joe and Patty provided the foundation to set up this East/West challenge.

By 1972, the Steering Committee was meeting regularly. They intentionally decided not use the wording "First Annual" in reference to the regatta. They agreed the competition should occur early in the year before the formal collegiate rowing season began. A high priority from the beginning was to showcase the sport and expose junior rowers to collegiate programs. The intent was a fun and fair winner-take-all competition for bragging rights between traditional and up-and-coming rowing powers from across the country. It was programmed to be fast moving and on-time, with elements to keep the spectators interested.

Most of the original Steering Committee members came from Patty's and Joe's connections as members of the ZLAC Rowing Club for women (est.1892) and the San Diego Rowing Club (est.1888). They both leaned heavily on their family and friends. Laurie Wyatt, Patty's daughter, was a graphic designer. That first year, the program and participants t-shirts were based upon a piece of artwork found in a clipart book, but Laurie went on to design unique t-shirts for over forty years. Gary Fraser, owner of Shirtales, a local company allowed her to use their facility without charge. She and another friend from ZLAC personally silk screened all of the t-shirts. Patty's son Duke Robinson and husband Frank Wyatt jumped in to work anywhere Patty needed. Permits were obtained from the City of San Diego and Mission Bay High School offered the use of their parking lot to accommodate the shell trailers. A welcoming committee greeted visiting crews at the airport with baskets of fresh California fruit donated from the Stehly Family's Organic Farm, and the Naval Academy provided housing for the visiting rowers in Navy Barracks.

Martha Shumaker was a family friend who grew up across the street from Patty. She remembers learning how to row from Patty at ZLAC. When Martha left her position overseeing media and public relations for the San Diego Wild Animal Park in 1972, Patty asked if she would be willing to do the same work for an upcoming regatta. In this role, she attended all of the Steering Committees that first year and fondly remembers working with Patty on the first Crew Classic. As Martha recalled, "It was an education in attention to detail, to fitting the event to the participants, and ensuring that everyone felt welcome and had the times of their lives."

Patty's focus for that first Crew Classic in 1973 was to shine a spotlight on the sport of rowing for San Diegans. Together she and Martha attended the Sportswriters and Sportscasters Association weekly meeting and convinced the local sports writers to cover the event. Chief among them was Bill Center, with San Diego Union Newspaper, who covered the regatta for years. Looking back, Martha still recalls the excitement they felt as the Crew Classic's reputation grew and it started getting coverage in The New York Times, Sports Illustrated and The Boston Globe.

The first regatta in '73 had nine colleges and three rowing clubs participating in twelve events on a Sunday morning the first week in April. People came from the San Diego area and beyond to watch the regatta. The order of the day started at 9 am with the men's singles on the 2000-meter course from the start located between the Catamaran Hotel and the ZLAC Rowing Club and a finish off the Bahia Hotel. Events started promptly every 15 minutes: the Lt. Wt. 4's, the Frosh 4's, and the Varsity 8's. A challenge race between crews from ZLAC in two of their historic barges was held on the 1000-meter women's course followed by five crews in the Girls 4's. At 10:30 am, the Junior Varsity 8's event included 6 crews and showcased the University of Washington (UW) and the Naval Academy. Men's Doubles and Lt. Wt. 8's started smoothly. Then, there was the Frosh 8's with UW and the Naval Academy. They would have one more competitive men's race at 11:45 am for the Varsity 8's after the Girl's 8's. The Crew Classic concluded at noon in a sweep by the University of Washington crews.

2000 meters is a long course, especially one that did not have buoys to define lanes, but there were targets to aim for near the finish line. San Diego Gas and Electric designed and installed a 963-foot overhead cable including support structures. Their regular line crews erected the structures and positioned the overhead lane markers. Lester E. Earnest developed the course layout which was then set by Glen Brandenburg and the San Diego State Student Association staff at the Mission Bay Aquatic Center. Mission Bay and San Diego Yacht Club boats lined the course to prevent interference of other boat activity between the Catamaran and the Bahia Hotels.

The Union Tribune Publishing Company funded the awards, including the San Diego Crew Classic Perpetual Trophy now known as the Copley Cup and the medals for the winning crews which were designed and struck by J. Jessop & Sons Jewelers. The winning Varsity 8 crew received gold medals with silver medals for the JV8, Frosh 8, and Lightweight 8 crews. At the wrap party, Joe Jessop gave out three medals engraved with "A Day to Remember" to Patty Wyatt, Martha Shumaker and Annette Frank for their contributions to the Regatta. His tradition of recognizing the outstanding efforts of volunteers continues to this day.

As coverage by sportscasters and writers increased in the early 1980's, the Crew Classic and Patty's organizational role gained prominence in the sporting community resulting in her being chosen to run the rowing venue at Lake Casitas for the 1984 Olympic Games. The Copley Cup became a coveted prize. Likewise, the Jessop-Whittier Cup, which was first awarded in 1993 to the winner of the women's collegiate eight.

So, a legacy began. That the San Diego Crew Classic would continue for 50 years and grow in scope and importance as it has is a testament to that early vision, careful planning and generous support described here. The work to stage the event in 1973 has been repeated by so many who deserve recognition and gratitude. The current team of leaders, board members, staff and volunteers reflect their own love of the sport, and enthusiasm for implementation which motivated Patty, Joe and their teams. San Diego and the sport are richer for it.