

The Officers, Directors and Members of
US SAILING
are pleased to present the
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL
to

ERIC WILLIS

for the rescue as follows:

On September 20, 2003 in the One Design Series at Santa Cruz Yacht Club in California, the wind was gusting in the 20's with 68-degree air and 58-degree water temperatures and 3'-5' seas. Eric Willis was photographing the event on board a Bombard 20' RIB Chuck's Folly following the "A" catamarans, when he saw Noah Flores' Santa Cruz 27 Saffron with an unsheeted spinnaker flying from the top of the mast like a flag. Willis turned and headed for this boat, hoping to take some photographs. Willis noticed that a second Santa Cruz 27 was circling which caused him to believe there must be someone in the water and floored it.

One of the Santa Cruz 27's were deploying a Man Overboard Pole, when Willis went to weather of the victim, placed the engine in neutral and drifted down on Richard Sturgeon in his inflatable PFD. Willis was waved away as the victim and his boat wanted to make the rescue. Saffron made a windward approach and after 5 people tried to pull the 240-pound victim aboard, they dropped him back in the water after 30-seconds of struggle while seemingly running out of strength. The Saffron crew frantically yelled to Willis to recover their crewman. Willis went to weather of the victim again, this time killing the engine drifting right down on him.

The victim attempted to climb up on to the Chuck's Folly, and had little strength left. He swung his right leg onto the side of the boat, which Willis grabbed while also grabbing the back of Sturgeon's pants and pulled him aboard. The victim had been in the cold water for 5 minutes, and Saffron asked that Willis take the victim to the harbor immediately. Sturgeon was showing the symptoms of hypothermia with his responses to questions fogged. Willis took Sturgeon to the showers at the yacht club to be warmed.

Congratulations to Eric Willis for coming to the aid of a mariner, and tending to his medical needs. US SAILING is pleased to present the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal in recognition of this event.

Ronald C. Trossbach
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee
By Direction

**The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal was presented to Eric Willis by US SAILING Safety at Sea Committee
Advisor Chuck Hawley at the Santa Cruz Yacht Club
Board of Directors meeting January 15, 2004.**



From Left to Right:
Eric Willis and Chuck Hawley
Photo by Greg Haws

DETAILS:

Nominators Name: Bruce Edwards

I approached both boats from leeward and saw a man in the water with an inflated life preserver. If I remember correctly, they were just in the process of throwing a man-overboard pole in the water near him. I immediately drove to windward, put the throttle in neutral, killed the engine, and drifted into the standard rescue position right next to him. He appeared calm and to my amazement, he indicated he didn't want me to pick him up, but he wanted his boat and his crew to. I wasn't sure what to think, so I drifted away from him slightly to see what they wanted to do. The sailboat made another pass at him from the windward side, where all five crew grabbed him and attempted to pull him out of the water. After about 30 seconds of this, it was apparent that the guy and the crew were just too tired to get him on the boat and they dropped him back in the water, frantically yelling at me to pick him up. I made another pass at him, again from weather, killing the engine, and drifting right next to him.

He attempted to climb up on to the boat, and quickly realized that he had little strength left. He swung his right leg onto the side of the boat, which I grabbed with my left hand, and my right hand grabbed the back of his pants. In this manner, I was able to drag him over the rounded gunwale of the boat. In hindsight this might have been easier over the stern, but it worked and didn't tear up his body like the stern fittings might have. If it hadn't worked, and if it felt like it might have capsized the zodiac, I would have immediately gone to the stern. His crew indicated to me to take him into the harbor immediately, which I did.

To his credit the victim (I can't remember his name) remained calm, collected, and personable during this entire event. I imagine this could have ended disastrously had he been panicking, so his calm both helped the situation (and unnerved me a bit, since I wasn't really sure how rational he was being). I did not know how long he had been in the water, so I had no choice but to presume he was hypothermic and act with the appropriate sense of urgency. On the way in, I chatted with him to attempt to determine his mental state, which appeared clear and rational. When we got to the harbor, I walked him to his car, and dropped him off at the showers on the public side of the harbor. In hindsight, I probably should have ensured that he actually made it into the shower, but seeing as he appeared lucid, it was a hot day, and the fact that I had no urge to accompany a 240 lb. man that appeared to be either hypothermic or intoxicated, guy into a public shower, I felt comfortable leaving him at his car.

After making sure all the A Cats were safe, I did check to see my rescued sailor was OK. He had gone home, but the crew assured me he was fine (albeit still cold from the water).

This event taught me several things:

- * How difficult it is to get a heavy tired sailor from the water onto a sailboat, even with the help of all five crew.
- * How the cold (and I think alcohol) appeared to mask judgment of the crew and victim in what was the smartest course of action.
- * How easy it was for a small outboard skiff/inflatable to maneuver in rough water compared to a sailboat.
- * How dangerous it was for the crew to assume that I could pull him out of the water by myself.

The good news is a potentially life threatening situation was averted.

What type hypothermia included: Mild

How did the victim get hoisted onto the deck: Low Freeboard

Sturgeon was giving the symptoms of hypothermia with his responses to questions fogged. Willis walked Sturgeon to the showers.

The names of the persons involved in the event were: Richard Sturgeon.

Boat Owners Name: Noah Flores sailing his SC 27 "Saffron".