

## From the Lead Boat

*By Gordon Dayton, President  
January 15, 2006*

Making yearly statements is what Presidents do. They also serve as leaders, guiding their organizations through perilous waters. The Board of Directors of any organization are responsible for long range planning and it is the job of Chairman to lead the board in making those plans. I find myself in the strange position of serving both as President and Chairman of the Board of NACK. I guess I should have a lot to say.

First our accomplishments: before it even had a name, NACK started out as a dream by a small group of instructors that wanted to offer more to our area. We wanted to form a group of well trained, safety minded, knowledgeable paddlers that could get out there and have serious fun. From NACK's foundation as an ACA Paddle America Club in June of last year we have all been working hard to build an organization we can be proud of. With our planned outings and our work commitment we have structured a club that is meant to both entice and mandate participation by all of its members. Through our free assessment program that ties into our paddling trips we seek to encourage a commitment to instruction and skills development. We did this because these aspects of some of the best paddling clubs in the world. ACA has just started a similar program of skills certification that is in limited use, but it is modeled after BCU certifications that have been around for years. Guess what, both are similar to the NACK program!

From 6 founders we have grown to 35 members in only six months. Our membership includes Derek Hutchinson and Wayne Horodwich who both help mentor the club. We have participated in six public events, 4 with on-water demonstrations. Last fall we ran 4 assessment opportunities as well as several instructional activities. We have already hosted a series of interesting and educational meetings with some great guest speakers. We have started the Paddlers Forum, a discussion and training group, now meeting prior to

each meeting. Our After Meeting Meetings are popular and well attended.

We have elected a seventh board member, Leslie Humphreys whose job it is to represent the lay membership on the Board. We have a new Membership Chairman, Debra Feehan and a Hospitality Chairman, Andy Feehan who we hope will play an active role in the club. We are growing, getting commitment and becoming a real club that can serve its members and help the paddling public.

Now our challenges: we have to get more members taking responsibility for our infrastructure. The fact that I have two executive titles was not in our plan. It is too much work and too much influence for one person to have. In my spare time I also act as Webmaster, help design policy and procedures and serve as an instructor. Before each general meeting, I usually preside at a separate Board and Executive Committee meeting which typically lasts 4-6 hours when we work on planning and growth of the club. If there is any remaining time I spend it working with the Atlantic Division as their new Coastal Kayak Chair or representing us all at ACA meetings. I am not unique, all of our Board members are wearing multiple hats and performing multiple jobs and working long hours for the club, yet some positions are still not staffed. But this cannot last. We need members who are willing to pick up a hat and put it on.

We already have had a number of assessment opportunities but still the bulk of our members are not assessed. Nor have we seen the assessment program generate the interest we had hoped to see for instruction. One of the strengths of this club is that we have a quality staff of in-house instructors available to help build member skills, but this resource is not being tapped. Partly the reason has been the season - many of our members are not equipped or trained to handle cold-water paddling. But we have seen only modest interest in the training and practice sessions available to NACK in the Sunday afternoon pool. Not only is the pool there to help our members, the costs cannot easily be covered without a strong group of regular participants. We had

hoped to start a second pool, but we do not currently see the interest.

We recently asked who would be interested in becoming a trip leader. With so many members at the novice level an overwhelming interest was not expected, but many of our more experienced members did not speak up. Most of the Board have busy summers teaching classes and will not be free to lead many trips. I see a problem on the horizon. The good news is, the ACA has just issued its first curriculum designed to train trip leaders. Not surprisingly it is very similar to what our Training Committee has already put together for NACK trip leaders. If the interest is there, the training is available, and with our mentoring program we insure that you are not forced to take on responsibility until ready.

I guess the message is: this is YOUR club it can only be what you make it. Paddling can be immensely rewarding. It is a lifetime sport. At the National Sea Kayak Marathon race in 2004, our friend, Bob Dean raced the Men's Open division and took second in a 20 km race losing first by only 40 seconds. He will be 68 this year. There are nearly as many unique aspects of paddling as there are paddlers and picking up a new interest is easier once you have the basic skills: touring, surf, whitewater, slalom, polo, freestyle canoe. We have hopes of building a number of specialty Sections to the club, including: Racing, Demo-Team, Native Skills, Adaptive Paddling. There are a number of cool projects that have been discussed such as: starting a Water Trail or building a youth program. All of this takes a strong, active, well-trained membership.

We have had a busy past year and a bright future. I think we have some of the best, most active paddlers on Long Island. I know we have the best instructors and some of the most committed leaders. If we have members interested in learning and development we are going to really go places.

Gordon Dayton,