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NEWS

L.I. SOUND-ORIENTED NONPROFITS

SoundWaters, Young Mariners merging

By Evan Simko-Bednarski

STAMFORD — The SoundWaters schooner will soon be the flagship of a larger fleet.

SoundWaters, the non-profit based in Cove Island Park that teaches conservation and marine biology, is merging with Young Mariners, which teaches disadvantaged children to sail, leaders of both groups said Thursday.

Sitting in his organization's building in Cove Island Park, SoundWaters board Chairman Scott Mitchell said the merger was the result of a simple question: "We both want to grow. How do we do it best?"

Young Mariners, an 18-year-old organization that provides after-school swimming classes and summer sailing instruction to un-

derprivileged children, will become part of SoundWaters, a significantly larger organization that teaches some 27,000 students annually about the ecology of Long Island Sound.

The sailing school served 65 students in Stamford last year and 20 in its new Greenwich program.

In addition to teaching students the technical and social skills required to command a boat, O'Connell said the program had helped to expand their horizons.

"We are developing career paths for them," O'Connell said of his Young Mariners students. "I have kids calling me up at 16 or 17 saying, 'Where can I get a job as a sailing instructor or a launch operator?' They would never have thought of that as a pathway (before)."

The merger, Mitchell and O'Connell said, came about

over a friendly beer as a way to solve mutual needs.

"We can't teach any more kids than we currently do," Mitchell said of SoundWaters' facility on Cove Island.

O'Connell said the Young Mariners were also hoping to expand, and didn't have the resources to build a permanent home on the spot the city has leased them in Bocuzzi Park on Southfield Avenue.

"It's not easy — it costs an awful lot of money," O'Connell said. The merger should make it possible for the program to build a permanent home in the park — an educational center from which it can launch sailboats into Stamford Harbor.

The merger will also allow SoundWaters to approach environmental protection from another angle.

Leah Shemitz, SoundWaters' president, said, "We



Michael Cummo / Hearst Connecticut Media

SoundWaters Chairman Scott Mitchell, left, and Young Mariners Chairman Tom O'Connell announce the merger at the SoundWaters Coastal Education Center in Stamford on Thursday.

kind of fell into sailing because we discovered something really important — it's a wonderful way to have fun on the water."

"The problem with Long Island Sound is that if you don't swim or you don't sail, it's just there in background," she said. To care about its conservation, she said, "you've got to like it. You've got to love it. You've got to have fun with it."

Neither Mitchell, O'Connell nor Shemitz foresaw any immediate changes.

"The idea is to go slow,



SoundWaters' Coastal Education Center.

listen and learn," said Mitchell. But he said he hoped a new facility in Bocuzzi park could be built by 2019.

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