“Messing about in boats” was an unfulfilled boyhood dream for Ray Belles, a UNH Marine Docent. Today, he is ensuring future generations can make it a reality.

This spring, six families will row their homemade boats down the Oyster River, thanks to the efforts of Belles and fellow marine docents hosting the third annual Family Boat-Building Workshop at Kingman Farm in Durham.

Belles’ idea and a similar workshop sponsored by Wooden Boat magazine sparked the program. Belles, who was a Whittemore School of Business and Economics professor for many years, proposed the idea to UNH Sea Grant specialist Sharon Finchum Meeker ’75G three years ago.

Jim Clithero of York, Maine, participated two years ago with son Bill and grandson Brandon. He had always wanted to build a boat, he says. “Just the experience of building something together with our own hands makes it worth it.”

To be eligible for the workshop, each family must submit an application and essay. With the help of other marine docents, Belles cuts wood and creates the handmade kits. For those selected, the weekend kicks off with an orientation. Then it is off to work, with families providing their own hand tools to assemble their boats. On Saturday, participants take their boats home and decorate them in preparation for the following weekend’s Jackson Landing launch on Great Bay.

The workshop costs $500, which includes all materials, life preservers, oars and locks. Water safety is stressed before the boats hit the water, because, as Meeker notes, “No boat is unsinkable.” Belles boasts a “100 percent success rate.” Meeker agrees with that assessment. “Families are pretty fractured these days, even the best of them. This gives families three days out of their lives to work together at something and enjoy their company at the same time.”

—Suzanne Klunk ’95

For more information, visit www.unh.edu/marine-education or contact Meeker at (603) 749-1565.

Families that Boat Together, Float Together

PHOTO COURTESY OF EDMUND CHUN TAITE

PLANT COURTESY OF RAY BELLES

WORTH REPEATING

“If that doesn’t move you, nothing will.”
—David Leonard of UNH Cooperative Extension, on the five pounds of fat he puts on display during the introduction to “Smart Steps,” a program that encourages people to walk more and eat less.

BUCK TO BUMPER

At the annual Alpha Chi Omega fundraiser for cystic fibrosis, $5 gives passersby the opportunity to don sumo-wrestler suits and behave like human bumper cars on the lawn in front of T-Hall. Most combatants attempt to knock one another over and then hop on top. “Because it’s so padded, they don’t feel anything,” explains AXO president Lindsay D’Amato ’05. Except, perhaps, glee.
Mind Games

A quick trivia quiz: “Stick it!” is a positive exhortation in which UNH sport?

Answer: gymnastics, “stick it” referring to landing your dismount without moving your feet.

Head coach Gail Goodspeed has been helping UNH gymnasts “stick it” and win meets for the past 25 years, often with an emphasis on mental as well as physical preparation. She is assisted by husband Ed Datti, associate head coach for 21 years, and Beth Aparo, assistant coach for four years. Continuing to break its own records, the team has won four league championships and the Northeast regional championship, and has sent gymnasts to the nationals nine times. After capturing the East Atlantic Gymnastics League championship last year with a new school record of 196.75 (out of 200), the Wildcats look forward to hosting the first round of the NCAA championships on April 9, 2005.

Goodspeed, whose Ph.D. dissertation was on sports psychology for female athletes, emphasizes positive thinking and confidence-building exercises, as well as relaxation training.

Co-captain Jen Dickson ’04 says she gets very nervous before competitions. “I’ve become increasingly better at controlling my nerves. We practice visualization, sometimes visiting meet sites and mentally putting ourselves there.” Dickson says above all, the team focuses on working together. “We leave any differences outside the gym.”

The team’s season begins every year with a “Meet the Team” exhibition. The event is a reality check for the team, as well as a chance for the team to welcome back their loyal following, including young gymnasts from all over the region. Some of these girls may end up as part of the team themselves someday. Present members hail from places as close as Malden, Mass., and as far off as Texas and beyond. One team member, Mariana Pita-Teretini ’06, is from Valencia, Venezuela.

Although Goodspeed stresses psychological preparation, she says the team realizes physical training comes first. “They know they’ve got to maintain the physical stamina and training in order for any sports psychology to work,” she says.

“The girls train all year long,” she says. “Most of them will take maybe a month off in the summer. They ask for practice their first day back on campus.”

—Nan Fitzgerald ’02

Okay, so you don’t usually encounter flaming bubbles, disappearing Styrofoam and other amazing feats in the halls of academia. But last fall, an audience of kids and their parents in UNH’s Iddles Auditorium were treated to some Halloween high jinks, all in the name of science. It was fun (you could tell by the wild cheering from the audience), but it was educational, too.

“The goal is to make them ask, ‘How does that work?’” says Ian Hepburn ’04, president of Alpha Chi Sigma, the student chemistry group that hosted the Halloween Magic Show, which is back after a long hiatus. The group plans to continue the tradition in coming years, which is a good thing. Because you never know: for some kids, watching a college student use a frozen banana to hammer a nail into wood just might be the start of a life devoted to inquiry and scientific exploration.

—Suki Casanave ’86G

MUGGLE MAGIC MANIFESTS

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS MACNEIL