

KNBR Interview

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This is Gimmy Park Li your host and with me in the studio today are Jay Palace, also Carisa Harris Adamson and Patty Block. Jay is CEO of GEL, that's Group Experiential Learning, and he is also organizing sponsor of the BIG Team Regatta. Carisa serves as President of the Board of Directors at the Treasure Island Sailing Center Foundation. Patty Block is a PR consultant for the BIG Team Regatta.

There are numbers to remember, the first one is at 1 888 GEL TEAM, that's 1 888 G-E-L TEAM. There's also a web site at BIGsf2005.gelcorp.com, that's BIGsf2005.G-E-L-C-O-R-P.com.

A reminder that the BIG Team Regatta is set for Friday, October 7 at the Berkeley Marina.

Gimmy: I wanted to have you, Jay, talk to our listeners personally as to what's available to them if they want to participate in the BIG Team Regatta on Friday, October 7. What can they look forward to?

Jay: Gimmy, first of all thanks very much for giving us the time to speak about the event. The BIG Team Regatta is a corporate sailing challenge to benefit the youth and adaptive sailing programs at the Treasure Island Sailing Center. It's all for a good cause. But what it really is, is a great way to get out on the bay, learn about sailing and then compete against other corporate teams who are interested in supporting our cause. What people can expect is a morning training session. It's very much like my company's team-building events.

Gimmy: Training on the Bay itself?

Jay: Training on the Bay.

Gimmy: You're just going to toss these people into the Bay?

Jay: Well, this is actually something that we do with the help of our partner, OCSC, one of the leading sailing schools in the country. We take corporate groups out all the time and use the sailboat as a platform for experiential learning. Sailboats really help people

learn how to communicate, learn how to work better as teams, develop problem-solving skills and leadership skills. What we're really here to talk about today is how those same benefits can have a much greater impact when they're experienced at a much earlier age, which is what the Treasure Island Sailing Center does.

To answer your question, folks from large corporations and small corporations and even individual groups of donors are going to get out on 24 foot sailboats with a sailing coach. No sailing experience is required. In the morning we'll teach them how to sail the boat. After a nice lunch we'll go out at one o'clock for a series of real races where, aided by their professional sailing coach, they will compete against each other and then celebrate at the end of the day with a nice party at OCSC over in Berkeley.

Jimmy: I think this is amazing. You're actually going to throw them in there and they're going to sink or swim or sail, right?

Jay: They are not going to sink! And no one is likely to swim. Everyone of course will be wearing all the safety flotation devices.

Jimmy: And they'll be so heavy they won't be able to move (laughing)

Jay: Well, I'm happy to say that no one has yet joined the GEL swimming team. We've kept everybody on board the boats for a number of years and I think Anthony Sandberg, the CEO of OCSC, would say the same thing: that although folks may be afraid of getting out in the bay – San Francisco has the reputation of being a very windy place – we take all the precautions so that it's all smiles and no scary encounters with the cold waters of the Bay.

Jimmy: So everyone who joins should have an excellent experience then?

Jay: Yes they will.

Jimmy: Have you done this before?

Jay: Yes, this is actually the third year that GEL has done a BIG Team Regatta. We've done the event for the last 2 years running in Annapolis, Maryland to raise money for a very similar program to the Treasure Island Sailing Center's programs and we've raised over \$70,000 dollars to help kids from disadvantaged communities get involved in a highly educational sailing program.

Jimmy: You know you're bringing this event to the San Francisco Bay at a time when those who are listening to us are thinking about sailing for the first time – sailing as a sport. They're thinking "Well, this is really an elitist type sport. This is something that I can't really participate in." But you're going to prove them wrong, aren't you?

Jay: Yes I am, and I think that's a question that Carisa Harris could address quite well. She actually got me into this, 5 years ago, into sailing at the Treasure Island Sailing

Center and encouraged me to become one of her volunteer coaches. It was then that I learned the value of sailing and learned how the sport is not elitist.

Gimmy: You actually roped Jay into this 5 years ago. How did you do that?

Carisa: Yes I did. Jay was an eager volunteer and was interested in teaching some of our children about sailing and luckily I gave him other opportunity to teach some kids about sailing. He really flourished and came back to us a few years later with this fantastic idea about the BIG Team Regatta.

I'm glad that you brought up the vision that people have of sailing being an elite sport. That's something that is really changing around the world and specifically in this country. We're seeing a large increase in community sailing centers around the nation and we're happy to be one of them. We are changing that vision of sailing and making it more accessible to people in the community.

Gimmy: You're here representing today, you're president of the Board of Directors at the Treasure Island Sailing Center Foundation. So the foundation is set up to really be of service to the community, right? I mean you have sailors who enjoy this sport of sailing but you also want to broaden those who might have an interest in it. You want to help them develop their interest.

Carisa: Yes, our mission at the Treasure Island Sailing Center is to make sailing accessible to everyone and anyone who has the interest to get out on the Bay, and they can do so at the Treasure Island Sailing Center. We started this about 5 years ago and it was with a vision that we need to make sailing accessible to everyone. I think that our project will be successful when we walk into any given neighborhood and hear children talk about their sailing experience and that's what I hope to hear.

Gimmy: Is this going on already? Are children involved on pretty much a daily or weekly basis with your programs at the foundation?

Carisa: Yes of course. Gimmy, I actually taught the first sailing class 5 years ago with 10 girls. This summer we have 700 kids in our program. They're from neighborhoods all over the Bay area. It's really been an incredible experience to see this program grow and be a part of it.

Gimmy: Alright, 700 kids already involved, doing what kinds of things? Do you just have them watch from the shore...what kinds of adventures?

Carisa: They are very active participants!

Gimmy: Do they get wet?

Carisa: Yes, luckily O'Neill has kindly donated a bunch of wet suits and we have all the safety gear necessary. The 700 children this summer alone will all be out sailing on the

Bay. They can do anything from a one day sailing orientation to a week of beginner sailing classes. Some of our kids even stay for 4 weeks and are part of our race team. We have some children who are actually traveling around the Bay area racing on our little boats for the first time, which is very exciting for us.

Gimmy: A sailboat – and I am not a marine person so you're going to educate me as well as some of our listeners – a sailboat has no motor?

Carisa: Correct. These sailboats are very small. They do not have a motor. The children learn on boats that range from 8 foot dinghies to 24 foot boats, very similar to the ones that will be used in the BIG Team Regatta.

Gimmy: So these boats rely on the sail and they rely on nature.

Carisa: Yes, it is a unique sport because it is something that really teaches kids about the environment. They're using the wind and the water to control their boat. Without a motor, they are controlling the sail and they're steering the boat with a tiller. And from day one they learn that they need to be self-reliant, and they gain a sense of confidence and independence because they do learn how to take this little boat out on the Bay by themselves and get the boat back in completely under control.

For the larger boats, the 24 foot boats that are similar to the boats used in the BIG Team Regatta, they actually have to work with 5 other children to get the boat safely back into the docks. That really depends on teamwork and communication, a lot of skills that kids will use in other aspects of their life. And that's really what it's all about. This is just a forum to teach kids important skills that they can utilize in other aspects of their life. And for those kids who are really interested in continuing on with sailing, we have a lot of opportunities that await them.

Gimmy: This is terrific. So children learn about themselves. First of all, sailing requires a lot from the human being. You've got to use your body, you have to know how to make that tiller go the way you want it to. And it's all dependent on nature and the wind that is going through the Bay at that time. And these children also learn to depend upon each other. There's a lot of interpersonal relationship going on here and being developed, isn't there?

Carisa: Yes there is. For the small boats, they can't launch a boat in the the water unless they work together and help each other launch it into the water. So they need team work just to get their boats out sailing. For the large boats, you might have 2 children on the smaller sail called the jib, you might have 2 more children on the mainsail, and another child steering lithe boat. They all have to work together to actually control the boat and sail it upwind and then back downwind to the docks. It really does capitalize on teaching these children important skills that they're going to need.

Gimmy: I'm fascinated by this. You can tell by my line of questioning. So actually, Jay, this is more than just a regatta where beautiful boats go out in a nice orderly fashion in

the Bay. This is more than that right? What you plan on October 7 is a whole lot more than just a parade of boats.

Jay: It is much more than a parade of boats. There are really 3 goals for the regatta: one of course is a fundraising goal because the programs that Carisa has been talking about cost money. I believe about 85% of the kids are in a partial or full scholarship for these life-changing programs. So one goal is fund-raising.

Another goal of the BIG Team Regatta is to raise awareness in the community, actually the community outside the sailing world, and raise awareness of the Treasure Island Sailing Center. Many programs like the Treasure Island Sailing Center's across the county rely on corporate giving. Our regatta is going to raise somewhere around \$40, 000 dollars.

Gimmy: On October 7th, you're hoping for that?

Jay: We're hoping for \$40,000 dollars, in this our first year of doing the regatta here in the Bay area. As I mentioned, and about corporate giving, it takes more than \$40,000 dollars to get 700 kids through a summer program. There are instructors, there's equipment. What we're trying to do is help some corporations become aware of the Treasure Island Sailing Center in the hope that they'll get involved on a larger basis going forward.

On the east coast, we actually did this event and we've done it for the last 2 years. We got a nice opportunity like this one and had an article written about one of our great volunteers. As a result of that article, a CEO of a multimillion company called up the newspaper, found the name of the writer, got to me through the writer, entered a team in the regatta and has subsequently joined the board of the foundation on the east coast, which is called **Kids Set Sail**. Why that's important: this gentleman, his name is Chuck Lawrence, sits on the board of the Boys and Girls Clubs of greater Wash DC. He's also involved with the First Tee program, which I believe Tiger Woods is involved with, which gets kids from underserved communities out on the golf course to learn those lessons.

Getting corporate leaders involved with programs like the Treasure Island Sailing Center which has been, to this point, totally grass-roots and driven by volunteers is important. And it's also important for corporations to want to do this. In order to have a successful business climate, you need a healthy community. And a healthy community has lots of healthy kids who are learning great things and going off to higher education, which I would say is a second goal.

The third thing, while of course we're talking about these great benefits for kids, is for the corporations themselves.

Gimmy: What do they get out of this?

Jay: They have a great time and 4 of their team members get one day to experience all of the benefits of being out on a sailboat. The team building aspects that Carisa mentioned, they accrue to adults as well as the children.

Gimmy: Wait a minute, these corporate team members, they just sit in a special seat in the boat, don't they?

Jay: No, they do not.

Gimmy: What do you mean? They're not just out there with a favorite beverage and enjoying what's going on? What do you put them through?

Jay: We put them through a training session in the morning

Gimmy: I think they want to do this, right? They truly want to so this.

Jay: Yes, they do. In fact no sailing experience is required at all. A professional sailing coach from OCSC will take them through a safety briefing, then take them out for a 2 hour primer on learning to sail. One of them will be driving the boat, one of them will be taking care of the main sail, the large sail. Two of them will be taking care of the jib. Between the 4 of them they have to decide where to go, where is the wind going to be...

Gimmy: These are your 4 corporate members?

Jay: Four corporate members

Gimmy: And they have to work together during this session?

Jay: Yes they do. If they do not communicate effectively their boat will either be very slow or won't go in the direction of the race course.

Gimmy: And corporations never like to fail, and corporate people never like to fail.

Jay: That's probably true, but I have to say that making mistakes is a good thing. Although the goal may be to win the regatta, the real goal is raise money for Treasure Island Sailing Center. But if on a sailboat, the boat doesn't go where you want it to go, it's probably the breakdown in communication among people on board the boat. The physics of a sailboat are such that the boat has to be moving in order for the tiller, which Carisa mentioned, to actually be able to turn the boat.

Gimmy: Jay, this is not a boardroom situation is it?

Jay: It is not like the boardroom.

Gimmy: But it sounds like you're bringing some of the same dynamics onto the sailing craft.

Jay: That's actually why a lot of companies choose sailboats as a vehicle for team building. Much like the corporate world where you need to communicate via email or conference call, information has to flow from one part to another, people have different communication styles. And the sailboat provides a safe environment to experience different people's communication styles, leadership styles and learn.

For example, if Mary is in charge of the finance department and Bill is the head of sales, Mary may need an awful lot of information from Bill. If Bill is an information hoarder, that's going to come out on the sailboat as well. He won't be telling Mary that he wants to turn the boat to the left and in order for the boat to go to the left, Mary actually has to make an adjustment with her sails or else it just won't go.

Gimmy: I love this. This is just a wonderful picture that you're creating for our listeners. We are on radio you know, so we have to help them visualize everything.

Jay: I'm happy to do it. I would say that probably everyone you have in the room here, everyone involved in the Treasure Island Sailing Center, is a champion for the sport. We would love to have more people enjoying San Francisco Bay. It's not a group of people struggling to communicate on the water. In a very short period of time, anyone can control a sailboat and have fun working with their friends out on a sailboat.

Gimmy: And just by saying those very important words, I'm sure you've boosted the confidence of those non-sailors in our listening audience who are now beginning to think that maybe they could be out there with you.

Jay: They can. And one thing you mentioned earlier about folks having an assigned seat, or sitting there holding their drink or having to do a lot with their bodies. The nice thing about sail boats is that there are lots of labor saving devices on board the boat that allow anyone to use a boat. This is probably a good opportunity to talk about the other program that we raise money for, which is adaptive sailing. Adaptive sailing is sailing geared toward people with physical disabilities – amputees, paraplegics, quadriplegics.

Gimmy: They have a place out on sailboats too?

Jay: Gimmy, they have a place on sailboats that allows them to compete on an equal footing with able bodied individuals. What I'm telling you is that you do not have to have the use of your arms and legs to control a sailboat. Treasure Island Sailing Center, through the donations of great people, has invested in equipment called access dinghies. First of all, their boats won't capsize, so if you're a quadriplegic you don't have to worry about drowning at any time. These are boats that you can control and race against other people.

One of the anecdotes I have about this that actually fuels my passion is, Carisa at one point 5 years ago asked me to go down on the dock and help get a gentleman out of a dinghy and into his wheelchair. I had not seen adaptive sailing before. I didn't actually know what his condition was. As I and a few other people helped him out of his boat and

into his wheelchair, I learned that his name was Herb. I said, “So, Herb, do you like sailing?” And he looked at me and kind of cocked his eyebrow, looked at me like I had insulted him and he said, “What is your name?” And I said, “Well it’s Jay.” And he says, “Jay, I have difficulty feeding myself...”

Gimmy: He was going to educate you, wasn’t he?

Jay: Yes he did. Herb said, “I have difficulty with things that are easy for you. But I can race you and beat you across the Bay. Do you think I like the sport of sailing?” And that gave me chills and I apologized. Herb is greatly involved in the Bay area disabled sailing program and the Treasure Island Sailing Center’s facilitation and support of disabled sailing in the Bay area. So if anyone is listening who thinks, “I haven’t been to the gym in 15 years, I’ve got a bad back, I’ve got a bad shoulder, or I’ve got a bad knee,” sailboats are designed so that anyone can enjoy the bay.

Gimmy: This is Gimmy Park Li, your host. I wanted to get our two other speakers back into our discussion. With me here today are Jay Palace, Carisa Harris-Adamson and Patty Block. Jay is CEO of GEL, that’s G-E-L, Group Experiential Learning and is organizing sponsor of the BIG Team Regatta. Carisa is President of the Board of Directors at the Treasure Island Sailing Center Foundation. Patty Block is a PR consultant working for the BIG Team Regatta. There is that phone number to remember at 1 888 GEL TEAM. That’s 1 888 G-E-L TEAM. There’s also a web site. You simply click onto BIGsf2005gelcorp.com. That’s [BIGsf2005 G-E-L-C-O-R-P.com](http://BIGsf2005G-E-L-C-O-R-P.com). A reminder that the BIG Team Regatta is set for Friday, October 7 at the Berkeley Marina.

Patty Block I haven’t been able to bring you in, but I’m going to bring you into our discussion now. What does this all mean for you? You made a call to us and said, “I want to tell you about this great event.” What does this all mean to you and to those that are involved with you?

Patty: I’m just excited, Gimmy, to be involved in this event. I think it’s a fantastic way to get additional visibility for the pleasures that the Bay has to offer. And the fact that both youth programs and adaptive sailing programs are supported through fundraising and corporations donating their time and energy and interest I think is just a fantastic way to get additional visibility for, bottom line, the Treasure Island Sailing Center. There is, as Jay mentioned, some grass roots PR and programming going on, but I think we just want to spread the awareness and this is a great way to do it.

Gimmy: Let me go back to Carisa. Carisa is President of the Board of Directors at the Treasure Island Sailing Center Foundation. You’ve been there, you’ve worked every summer and maybe during the rest of the year with children who haven’t had a sailing experience before and this is more than just putting them out a sailboat and having them sit comfortably. They actually get to learn about the wind, they get to learn about that tiller, they get some really hands-on experience, don’t they?

Carisa: Yes they do, Gimmy. And actually I'm a volunteer at the Treasure Island Sailing Center Foundation. It really is just a wonderful way to spend my spare time because I really do enjoy making opportunities for these kids and creating more opportunities for them, to learn to grow, to really have opportunities that they might not have had our program not been around. Again, an example that I can think of are some of our kids this year who have started racing around the Bay and now they've met children from other parts of the Bay area. We've hired them as junior instructors so they can mentor other children. As we grow, they're growing. And we hope to provide them with more opportunities to work at the Treasure Island Sailing Center to help guide them into universities and colleges that might have sailing teams. It really is an exciting thing to be a part of.

Gimmy: You mentioned colleges and universities. So you begin with the kids. But there's also this encouragement for them. Maybe they develop it as they are in the program at the sailing center. Maybe they begin to think, "I can move from my own neighborhood. I can move beyond the confines that I've been born into. I can move beyond there."

Carisa: Yes of course. We had some children last summer from Oakland. They live within a few miles of the Bay and had actually never seen the Bay

Gimmy: Let alone being on the Bay.

Carisa: Let alone being on it. For some of the kids, they took to the challenges right away and they were actually sailing by the end of the week. For some of the other children, it was frightening for them. They had never seen the Bay, much less been on the Bay or in it. And it took us a little bit of time to get them comfortable with the water. But one of the empowering things is that, by the end of the week, one of the children looked at our instructor and said, "You know I'm not scared of being in the water anymore."

That was really a very powerful thing for us who work so hard to make these opportunities available for these kids. Because that was something that was scary for that child, it was a challenge set before him and he succeeded. He built some confidence and all of a sudden knew of this whole world outside of his neighborhood that he could be a part of.

Gimmy: Anytime you build your own confidence, when those doors are opened to you, that means other doors will be opened in your life as well.

Carisa: Of course. And the children that really do take to sailing will have the opportunity to meet new people, which will inevitably bring more opportunities to them, whether it be career related, university related, academic related or just personal growth. So that's really what we're looking to provide.

Gimmy: And while these kids are out on a boat, when they learn the skills, they learn to be in control of their own lives. There is some ownership. They own that boat for those

few hours that they are out there. They know that have responsibilities and they learn how to demonstrate and illustrate those responsibilities. They can do it.

Carisa: Yes, and the exciting thing for a lot of the children is that this is something that maybe nobody else that they know can do. Their parents don't know how to sail. Maybe other children in their neighborhood have never experienced sailing. Of course we hope to change that and have it be an experience that all the children in our neighborhoods can experience. It really is empowering for them because for a short period of time, it's something new and different that they're in control of. They don't have anyone telling them what they have to do or what they need to do. They can just go out there and be free and have a fun experience being a kid.

Gimmy: Jay, you have done this 2 other times, these fund-raising benefits on a sailing craft. Corporations can easily write a check and help fund your project. That's welcomed too. But it really means something for you to have the corporate people there on site and in those sailing boats.

Jay: Yes, it really does. I actually think corporations get involved for different reasons. There's a couple of ways companies choose to get involved. Some companies can't take a day off of work and get their fold out sailing. But they say, "It's great cause" and write a check directly to the Treasure Island Sailing Center.

Gimmy: And she'll take that right? Carisa will take that and make good use of it.

Carisa: Of course. (smiling)

Jay: And it's a non-profit so it's a tax deductible donation. Other folks say, "Gee I like the idea of doing something fun while doing something really good. Corporations like to be associated with good causes. At the moment, we have a few more boats available. We've got some great corporate teams already on board, although we're 6 weeks away from the regatta.

Gimmy: That's right, it's a regatta. It's not just one solitary sailing craft.

Jay: Oh no. There's going to be 10 boats out there. Right now, we have teams from Bank of America, from E*TRADE FINANCIAL, from First Republic Bank, and from Warmington Homes. We also have several others that are funded by private donors. But there are more boats available. A corporation or group of individuals makes a \$4,000 dollar donation to the Treasure Island Sailing Center and in return they get a J24, which is a 24 foot boat, they get the professional sailing coach to keep them safe and having a good time, they get a great regatta shirt that's been donated by the Sport Basement and embroidered by Team One Newport.

I'm mentioning a lot of our great sponsors because companies can get involved in sponsoring the event either through an in-kind donation like Sunsail, which is donating a cruise down in the British Virgin Islands, which we're going to auction off at our

wonderful party. We have SAIL magazine providing some advertising, and they're also entering a team in the east coast event. We've got a great printing company, Typestries Sign and Design, that is making gigantic banners that are going to be on the mainsail of the boat, so E*TRADE FINANCIAL is going to have some great images of their smiling faces underneath their brand on a sailboat in front of the Bay bridge.

Gimmy: Corporations love that.

Jay: They do. And that's basically a little bit of cause-related marketing. But if you're going to go out on a sailboat, you want to capture the memories. We also have a sponsor, Greg Slick Productions, a local videographer, who's already doing an awful lot of filming for us. He's going to be filming live. We're going to have a commentator on board and every participant will go away with a DVD that captures their experience on the sailboat.

Gimmy: More than going over the side of the sailboat, right?

Jay: Exactly. There might be some water splashing, but OCSC is going to provide foul weather gear and other safety gear for everyone.

Gimmy: I wanted to remind our listeners that with me in the studio today have been Jay Palace, we've also heard from Carisa Harris Adamson and Patty Block. Jay is CEO at GEL, that's Group Experiential Learning. He is also organizing sponsor of the BIG Team Regatta. Carisa is President of the Board of Directors at the Treasure Island Sailing Center Foundation. Patty Block is a PR consultant for BIG Team Regatta. The BIG Team Regatta is taking place on Friday, October 7 at the Berkeley Marina.

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And this is Gimmy Park Li, your host. Thank you for sharing your time with us.