

# Challenged America Boats Given Makeover by Local Boatyard, Paint Manufacturer

Koehler Kraft and Interlux stepped in recently to aid the financially strapped nonprofit sailing organization.

By Jack Innis

SAN DIEGO — A boatyard, a paint manufacturer and several hands-on sailors recently gave a big boost to Challenged America, a nonprofit group dedicated to providing adaptive-sailing rehabilitation programs for kids and adults with disabilities.

Challenged America has had financial troubles for more than a year, forcing the program to curtail most of its activities due to lack of funds.

Broadly speaking, Challenged America provides recreation therapy to the disabled. Recreation therapy is often defined as a planned, organized and therapeutic program designed to help patients develop social skills and learn to participate in leisure group activities. By involving patients in leisure activities, such programs help differently abled persons develop or restore social functions and prevent further erosion of

physical capacities.

In its heyday, Challenged America competed in the Transpac, Chicago's Independence Cup and Canada's Mobility Cup. It sponsored hundreds of daysailing adventures and drew sailors from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe and Japan. Toward the end of 2005, financial difficulties forced the organization to pull most of its fleet of 13 sailboats from their donated berths at a Shelter Island marina. The trailerable vessels were placed into storage in Escondido; slip boats were scattered throughout various marinas.

But this summer, Challenged America was among two honored charities of Koehler Kraft's Wooden Boat Festival. The festival typically donates all its proceeds to charity. While attending the event, Challenged America's Urban Miyares ran into Koehler Kraft manager Garry Cihak. Miyares, a disabled Vietnam veteran who co-founded Challenged America in 1978, explained the organization's situation.

Cihak decided to help. He arranged for several of Challenged America's trailerable Martin 16s to be brought to the yard. The boats were, in polite

terms, "well used."

Longtime San Diego sailor Tom Sterling began the formidable task of refurbishing heavily damaged rudders on the two most dilapidated boats in the fleet of 13. Koehler Kraft foreman Albert Paniagua and painter Arturo Tapia volunteered their own time to restep the masts, tune the rigging and glass into place on the boats' keels, which had previously been retractable.

Interlux Yacht Paint Co. donated several gallons of its Micron Extra VOC, a copolymer antifouling paint that washes away (polishes) at a controlled rate similar to a bar of soap. The paint retails for more than \$200 per gallon.

Koehler Kraft and Interlux are now working on a third Martin 16 for Challenged America. Future plans include refurbishing the organization's Tripp 40. The Tripp 40 had previously been put up for sale and had attracted several offers, Cihak said. But as soon as prospective buyers discovered the yacht had been donated to the charity, as are all boats in the fleet, the offers were lowered substantially to the point that it did not make sense for Challenged America to sell the vessel, Cihak



Photo courtesy of Garry Cihak/Koehler Kraft

**Meeting the Challenge** — Two of Challenged America's Martin 16s were recently refurbished at Koehler Kraft, which, along with Interlux and several volunteer boaters, invested time, money and yard space to repair the dilapidated vessels for the nonprofit sailing organization. The organization has been hit by financially hard times in recent months.

said.

Now, Challenged America, Cihak and volunteers hope to corral enough resources to make the Tripp 40 ready to sail in the biennial Transpac Race from Los Angeles to Honolulu. The organization's 2005 Transpac crew of five was comprised of a totally blind man (Miyares) and another disabled person from the organization.

Although successful from a competitive and public relations standpoint, the 2005 Transpac

Race left Challenged America in debt. This debt exacerbated growing pains the organization had previously been experiencing. What began as an operation in the back of a garage grew to an organization paying more than \$5,000 a month in rent, not including dry storage.

Those seeking to volunteer or offer financial support are encouraged to call Challenged America's Urban Miyares at (619) 594-8805 or Koehler Kraft's Garry Cihak at (619) 222-9051.