

A Few of the Many Things that I Learned at MWSC ... (and why I was the first person to sign up the next year)

by Eliz Greene

Last May I joined more than 100 other women at the First Annual Midwest Women's Sailing Conference. The day-long conference featured 24 different classes from dock line handling and spinnaker setting to diesel engine maintenance and safety at sea. From salty racers with years of experience to novices who may have once thought sailing is really more "his thing," all were welcomed and appreciated at the conference. There was something for everyone. The 2011 sailing season was a particularly rewarding one for me, in large part because of the lessons I learned at the conference. Here are a few of my top takeaways:

Spring Lines Are Your Friends

Jan Guthrie and Phyllis McDonald rose to the challenge of teaching a dock line handling course inside! Their trick of backing onto a spring line running from the stern cleat of the boat to a wrap around a dock cleat at the beam, then back to the boat, made us look like rockstars as we left the fuel dock all season long! We also now have a carefully measured "stopping line" for our boat. A spring line attached to our midship cleat is always ready to be tossed over a cleat on the dock as we approach. It works like a charm! Once the line is attached, the boat can be controlled with a small amount of forward throttle to sit alongside the dock as you secure the rest of the lines. No jumping - no danger. Brilliant.

Dress For The Weather

There is no shame in packing the extra jacket. "Dress for the weather" advised the confirmation email from the 2011 Midwest Women's Sailing Conference. These were perhaps the four most important words to the success of the event! Certainly none of my 98 fellow attendees or the more than 40 instructors and volunteers could have predicted 40 knot gusts and rain falling sideways in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – on May 14th! Having foul weather gear easily accessible on our boat allowed us more confidence in less than perfect conditions. The foulie overalls with the drop-seat are a must have!

Check the Batteries First

In our Diesel Engine Maintenance class, Phyllis McDonald counseled that when you lose power, check your batteries first. Great advice I wish I'd remembered a little sooner when our instruments started flickering on and off this summer. We checked the connections in the pod, behind the main panel, and were about to go "zebra hunting" (as in the saying, "when you hear hooves behind you, your first guess shouldn't be zebras") when all the electronics – and all the electrical power – zapped out after a tack to starboard. Hmm... could it be? Yes, indeed. A loose connection at the battery. Problem solved with a quick turn of the wrench. Again, a good lesson to remember sooner rather than later!

Register Early

I can't wait for the 2012 conference. Space is limited to just 100 women, so my registration went in when the first email arrived. It promises to be another information-packed day featuring more individual classes and keynote speaker Nancy Erley, who has circumnavigated twice – with all female crews! It will be a great day. Of course we are all hoping for better weather so we can put some of this great instruction to use on the water!

Eliz Greene, her husband Clay, their twin teenage daughters, and their two corgi dogs cruise and race on Lake Michigan aboard their 1989 Catalina 34.