

# The Flat Hat

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## Hands on: Rowers help community

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As the fall season begins, members of the College of William and Mary Rowing Club settle into their standard routine of pre-dawn practices, palm blisters and, unexpectedly, painting houses. The extra labor is not a groundbreaking new workout; rather, a part of the club's Rent-a-Rower Program. For a rate of \$15 an hour, customers can rent rowers to help with weekend projects.

Rent-a-Rower coordinator Jamie Lewis '13 explained the practicality behind such intensive fundraising.

"Crew is an incredibly expensive sport to begin with, with boats that can cost upwards of \$30,000, along with other equipment and facilities to maintain," Lewis said. "The fact that we have to raise that money for ourselves makes fundraising an incredibly important part of our program."

The rental program helps rowers offset the club's dues, which makes the price less of an issue for students interested in crew.

Rower Bryan Monroe '14 credited the fundraising program with keeping the club available to all students.

"The Rowing Club is open to everyone, both experienced rowers and those who have never even heard of rowing before."

Monroe said, "We compete together in major competitive regattas in both the fall and the spring."

New club member Amber Bryant '16 also expressed her enthusiasm over the Rent-a-Rower Program's accessibility.

"I got to college, and I wanted to learn new things," Bryant said. "I'd never rowed before. Rent-a-Rower is a really good way to work for your money. The program is flexible and fits around your schedule."

This flexibility appeals to customers as well. Crew Captain Kate Nolan '13 noted that her team has tackled jobs of all sizes.

"We had an older couple who were moving to a different house," Nolan said. "We helped to move things from their attic into a storage unit. We've done a lot of moving jobs. We can do pretty much any sort of manual labor that people need help with."

In fact, local residents have tested the club's professed ability to handle any chore. Monroe listed a number of diverse jobs that he has completed with Rent-a-Rower.

"I've been asked to do a variety of interesting tasks: dog walking, treadmill-building, concrete mixing, cleaning up the football stadium after a game. That was gross," Monroe said. "I've done amateur landscaping and even some tree removal following last year's hurricane. We will pretty much do anything within reason."

Monroe said Rent-a-Rower allows the club to maintain the strong sense of camaraderie.

"We're a social club to some extent," he said. "Hanging out with rowing friends is a big part of what we're about."

The bonding opportunities and profits have contributed to the program's longevity. Nolan said there are a lot of benefits to working in the community.

“One family bought us a box of pizza,” she said. “We got to bring it home after we were finished working. One woman invited us inside and gave us chocolate cake. We got to exchange emails, and she gave us her recipe. It was nice to make a personal connection like that.”

Lewis explained that these connections are an integral part of the program’s success.

“One woman first hired me back in the fall of my sophomore year, before I was running the program, and she’s kept asking me back,” Lewis said. “I’ve gotten to know her whole family, and I’ve helped her move twice. We’ve become really close over the years, and it’s really nice knowing some adults off campus.”

Nolan agreed that the club is lucky to be a part of the Williamsburg community.

“Our club is really fortunate because we have a lot of people who are willing to hire us,” Nolan said. “We live in a great community; a program like this wouldn’t succeed everywhere.”

Lewis expressed his appreciation for the local customers, describing the bond that forms between the renters and the rowers.

“We’ve been doing the program for at least 20 years, and we’ve developed some really long-lasting relationships with people in the area,” Lewis said. “Rent-a-Rower makes you feel much more integrated in the Williamsburg community.”