

Notes from the Wharfinger 2

Bo Curtis, Wharfinger, 2023

Daily Wharfinger Duty

I have always welcomed spring equinox, the time of year when daylight hours begin to outweigh those of darkness, when the sun returns to the northern hemisphere and shines with an intensity that hints of the coming summer. Just as the role of wharfinger has encouraged me to look at our marina through different eyes, it has nudged my anticipation of summer in the direction of looking ahead at the daily wharfinger program. Here are a few of my thoughts.

As club volunteer jobs go, wharfinger duty is arguably the plum. You get to come down to the club, look over its general state, spend time on your boat or on the docks chatting with fellow members and, most importantly, greet reciprocal visitors and make them welcome. Do this four times in the summer and you've already met your 20-hour volunteer commitment! It almost feels like a scam.

Over the years I've taken advantage of this scam enough to understand that the whole program rests on how we answer two key questions: who gets to be wharfinger for a day, and how does that lucky person know where to put visiting boats?

Until recently both questions were answered with a dry erase marker in the gatehouse. On a stylized calendar you put your name next to a date, and the gig is yours. On the appointed rounds of your day, you check the other poster on which members have written in their vacated slip number and expected date of return.

My predecessor, Doug Manton, initiated a system aimed at replacing the pen-and-ink signup with an online calendar. Signup is now convenient and possible remotely, although a caveat persists: if circumstances change and you can't be available on the day you signed up for, it's your responsibility to find a replacement. I'd like to include a way to make that quest easier, possibly by including a space on the calendar to sign up as a standby for specified days. If finding a replacement were less burdensome, members may feel less reluctant to sign up in the first place.

The question of which slips are available to be assigned to visitors is still dependent on members signing out when they leave. They may forget to do so, or if their return date is uncertain, they may indicate the earliest date possible. Full disclosure, I've been guilty on both counts. The consequence in either case is an empty slip that's not available to visitors. I'd like to find a way to put this procedure online as well; with the magic of cellular data and wifi, there's no reason why as well; with the magic of cellular data and wifi, there's no reason why a forgotten signout can't be added, or a return date amended enroute.

These ideas take some time and technical support, and they may not be realized in time for summer, but it's the direction in which I'd like to go. Meanwhile the system we have has been working adequately, and the most important thing is to accommodate reciprocal visitors and to welcome them warmly to our jewel of a club.

Notes from the Wharfinger 2

Bo Curtis, Wharfinger, 2023

Tour of Duty

The Daily Wharfinger Schedule is now live on the website, and you can sign up by logging in to the member section and clicking on Calendars.

Today is your day. You've signed up for daily wharfinger duty, and you arrive at the club in time to start at 1100. In the foyer of the clubhouse you find the binder left by yesterday's volunteer. Check the most recent pages; three boats arrived yesterday, two of which are leaving today, the third is planning to stay a second night.

Before you go down to the docks, check the outside washrooms, and make sure they're stocked with toilet paper and paper towels, and that the facilities are in the kind of condition you'd like if you were using them.

On your way to the docks, stop at the gatehouse and check the slip signouts. The key information for you is to know which slips are vacant, what size they are, and when the member's boat is expected home. One "vacant" slip shows a return date of yesterday, and a glance at that slip confirms it's now occupied by the club boat; scratch that slip off your available list. Another slip is signed out until today. Scratch that one too, you don't want to put a visitor in that slip; I've returned from a cruise to find my slip occupied, and it's a pretty awkward situation.

One of the visitors leaving today has indeed left, so that slip is available. The other hasn't left yet; you may need to visit him, ask his intentions, and perhaps confirm that he'll be checking out by noon.

Head on out to the kiosk, at the junction of C and F docks. Here you find that a reciprocal visitor arrived at 1030 this morning, and they self-registered. Go have a chat with them, welcome them and ask if they want an inside slip, and see if you have one their boat would fit. Ask to see proof of liability, and if they have a galvanic isolator if they want shore power. All the rules that apply to us apply to visitors; they always understand, and usually their clubs have similar rules.

Try to get a picture of who is here, for how long, where they're from, and what slips are available today. Once you have that, leave a note in the kiosk with your name, and where you can be found. With all in order, head to your boat and get to work on that project you've been wanting to get at. I hope it's not too far in the bilge, as you want to hear the call buzzer in case someone arrives when you weren't looking.

An hour later you notice a sailboat tying up to the outside of F dock near the kiosk. Go greet them; welcome them to Salt Spring, ask if they've been to the club before. Point out the visitor rules in the kiosk, and answer any questions. Verify their length and see if you have an inside slip, and if not suggest they tie to BW dock, facing the wake slop.

Before you know it it's 1600 and you're going off duty. Record the day's activity in the binder; previous entries are a guide to the detail expected, but add anything you feel is interesting or important. Think about what was left for you by yesterday's wharfinger, and what tomorrow's will find when they arrive. On your way back to the clubhouse cast an eye around and ensure that the club is in the state you want, as today was your tour of duty.

Notes from the Wharfinger 2

Bo Curtis, Wharfinger, 2023

The Daily Wharfinger Schedule

As announced in the last Crowsnest, the calendar page for the daily wharfinger schedule is now up and running on the club website. On the “public” side of the website the calendar is visible to be read, but in order to sign up you need to log in to the member section.

Signing up is straightforward; click on “sign up” on the date(s) of your choice, and you will be taken to a page asking for your name, email and phone number. Once you click “sign up” at the bottom, your name will appear on the calendar, and you’ll receive a confirmation email.

If you’ve done this in recent years you’ll notice nothing different...yet. However, if you’ve either lost out on a date of your choice, or have signed up for a date you need to cancel later, there is a small change this year: each day now has room for two names.

If you, like many members, have been reluctant to sign up for a day weeks or months in the future, it’s most likely because you’re not yet sure you can commit to that day. The fact that you’re on the hook for finding a replacement doesn’t make the commitment any easier.

To be clear, only one member is needed each day. Signing up as the second volunteer is a way of saying to the first “if you can’t make it, contact me, as this is a day I can probably do it.” In fact, with each member aware of the other’s interest in that day, the two of you might even get together and work out a plan to share the day or swap some days.

In the era of pen-and-ink signup in the gatehouse there was a spot for a list of willing “standby” duty wharfingers. The signup poster is still there, and I propose we repurpose it as another place for members to indicate availability as a standby wharfinger. As with the “second” spot online, putting your name here is not a commitment, but merely an expression of interest and availability, to make the first volunteer’s hunt for a replacement a bit easier, should it become necessary.

Of course it would be wonderful to see a calendar with two names on every day, and numerous more names listed in the gatehouse. There are probably enough willing club members to make that a possibility, were it not for pesky obligations we have in the rest of our lives. A more realistic expectation would be that at any time in the season, the schedule is full for the coming week or two or three.

I’d like to finish with a pitch of encouragement to any members who may be interested but feel trepidation about taking on being wharfinger for a day: Any time this summer you’re on the docks between 1100 and 1600, check in with the duty wharfinger. Ask them how their day is going, what they’ve been up to, what snags they may have run into, what people they’ve met. If you get an up-close glimpse at the role, you’ll realize that you can do it, do it your way, and maybe even find yourself offering suggestions that can further help all of us do it in the spirit of fun, camaraderie, and pride in our club.

NOTE: Although the calendar appears to call for duty wharfingers on May 19-21, the club will be closed to reciprocal visitors for the Round Saltspring Race and duty

Notes from the Wharfinger 2

Bo Curtis, Wharfinger, 2023

wharfingers are not needed on those dates. All other days from May 15 to September 15: yes please, sign up!

Signing Out Your Slip

I took an unintended break from this column in the last Crowsnest, mostly due to being preoccupied with the IOM regatta and the opening day sailpast. This Crowsnest comes at the beginning the 2023 daily wharfinger program, and timing is perfect to introduce what I'm hoping is an enhancement.

A key role for the daily wharfinger is to greet reciprocal visitors and assign them a moorage spot. Of course this can only be done if the person on duty knows which slips are available, and for how long. Historically this has been done by a simple and effective process: a member taking their boat away from the marina will write their slip number and length, departure date, and expected return date on the poster in the gatehouse. The duty wharfinger takes note of available slips, and assigns them to visitors accordingly.

While simple, it's not flawless. When packing provisions down the dock on the day of departure, it's easy to forget to sign out, or be thwarted by something as mundane as the dry erase marker being, well, dried up. Or you may not know exactly when you'll be returning, in which case a prudent skipper might post the earliest possible date. This is understandable, as nobody wants to return from a cruise only to find their slip occupied by a visitor who has taken their dinghy to town for dinner.

Thanks to the efforts of our webmaster Ryan's associate, Aaron, we now have an online alternative. Once logged into the club website, under the Member Resources dropdown menu you'll now find "Sign out your slip," which takes you to a form on which you enter the same information as on the gatehouse poster. The obvious advantage is that you can do this before or after your departure, which implies a further advantage: you can revise your return date while still out cruising.

A limitation of our website software is that you can't actually edit your return date once entered. You need instead to make a new entry, so there's an additional question asking if this is a revised return date. Entries made on the signout page are listed under the Member Resources menu item "wharfinger slip availability". This page serves the same purpose as the poster in the gatehouse, to give the daily wharfinger the information needed to assign slips to visitors.

The intention of this system is to allow members to sign out slips, and especially to revise return dates, while out cruising. In order for it to work the daily wharfinger will have the added task of checking the website when coming on duty, something I hope will not be too bothersome a price to pay for updated information. Ultimately the goal is to avoid having a vacant slip made unavailable, or a member coming home to find their slip occupied.

The web page should complement rather than replace the gatehouse signout. A likely scenario would be to sign out at the gatehouse, then several weeks into the cruise

Notes from the Wharfinger 2

Bo Curtis, Wharfinger, 2023

needing to come home three days earlier than the posted date; the member could revise the date online, thereby ensuring their slip will be waiting for them.

My thanks go to Aaron and Ryan for looking after our website, and to you, my fellow club members, for your indulgence in trying something new. Suggestions and feedback will always be welcome.