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### **Saratoga Rowing Association's Beloved Head Coach Retires**

*The board of Saratoga Rowing Association announces the retirement of one of the region's most successful scholastic team coaches and Executive Directors.*

**Saratoga Springs, N.Y.** – The Saratoga Rowing Association reluctantly announces the retirement of their beloved Executive Director and head coach, Chris Chase, who started the club 11 years ago.

In 1996, at the request of a number of Saratoga high school students who wanted to start a rowing team, the then 10<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teacher Chris Chase agreed to coach. With no prior rowing experience, no funding and disinclination from school leaders, Chase took the Saratoga Rowing Association to become one of the nation's elite high school rowing clubs.

Chase, 38, originally from Saratoga Springs was a popular teacher, inspiring his students to excel as highly in their academic achievements as they did in their sports achievements.

*“This entire experience has been unbelievable, but should have failed from the start, said Chase. We had no money, no school support, no boats, and I had absolutely no training to coach rowing! However, the students were determined and with the parents' faithful support, we've gone from nothing, to an 8-shell, year-round boathouse, six winning national championships and over 5 million dollars in college rowing scholarships for our rowers. Without sheer determination and support from the rower's parents, the community and great dedication from the athletes, none of this ever would have happened. I'm so proud to have been a part of it.”*

Initially high school officials worried that if the school attempted to start a rowing program and it failed, one of the state's highest performing athletic program's reputation would be tarnished. Conversely, some coaches worried that if the team succeeded; they would lose some of their star athletes.

Chase was undeterred. Marino's Pizza donated \$300 to help start the club and Steve Sullivan, owner of Longfellow's restaurant and the Olde Bryan Inn, hosted a fundraising event that raised close to \$3,000. Niskayuna high school (a staunch rival) donated the rowing club's first boat. For many years the team moved around never really finding a solid place to row from until Craig and Mary Skevington of Saratoga Lake allowed the quickly growing club to use their backyard property on Fish Creek to train out of. The team at its largest saw more than 160 athletes. Many years later and a highly distinguished team finally felt it was time for a permanent home on Saratoga Lake. Thankfully, developed Peter Belmonte donated 4 acres to the club which would be the beginning of the construction to build a year-round, state-of-the art boathouse. Many community members put in their help and local architect and rowing lover Tom Frost designed the building. The boathouse is now nearly completed thanks to a tenacious and aggressive board and parent-run campaign

*“We started with nothing but a handful of high school kids who had a dream and an idea and now SRA has over 167 of the country’s leading scholastic rowers and Chase was a vital part of this growth and success.” said past president Dennis deJonghe.*

Hosting regattas were no sweat to Chase. With no past experience but die hard volunteers the Saratoga Rowing Association hosted its first sectionals meet in 1998 and in 1999 hosted the state championship. Parents, the coaches and the rowers painted and anchored Coke bottles as lane buoys themselves and since that time have successful hosted “states” each year to much praise from competing schools. Saratoga quickly became one of the epicenters for rowing in upstate New York. Today these rowing regattas generate approximately 2.1 million dollars annually for the region. In 2006 the national U.S. scholastic championships brought in over 12,000 rowers, parents and coaches from across the country and an estimated 1.5 million dollars in tourism revenue.

Starting in 1998, rowers began winning college scholarships to four-year schools. To date SRA has sent 12 students to Ivy-league schools including Harvard, Dartmouth, Duke and Princeton. Scholarships have exceeded 5 million to date. Five SRA coaches have gone on to coach Division I schools, including, Harvard, Duke, Clemson and Miami.

The Saratoga Rowing Association’s board of directors accepted Chase’s resignation, in May with reluctance, but a great deal of gratitude for all he has accomplished over the past 11 years.

*“Good coaches inspire, motivate and achieve greatness from their athletes, great coaches transcend that and become father-figures and compel you to dig deeper than you ever thought possible, Chris Chase is that kind of coach. We will miss him very, very much,”* said co-president Nancy Bambara.

In May Chase purchased Mare Restaurant, which fulfills that dream to finally own his own restaurant. Mare Restaurant is located at 17 Maple Avenue in downtown Saratoga Springs and is a very popular summer and event location. Chase took over ownership on May 18<sup>th</sup> and will continue to coach full-time through August 2007.

*“Most people dream, said Chase, but very few people walk the dream. I’ve been able to do that as the head coach of one of the nation’s elite rowing clubs and next I’m going to do it by owning my own restaurant. It’s been quite a ride.”*

The SRA Board of Directors has appointed Eric Catalano, 33, to fill the position. Catalano is currently the women’s novice coach at Harvard University and Radcliff College. Catalano is also the head coach of the US Rowing Junior Women’s Development Camp. Prior to coaching at Harvard, Catalano was the head coach to the SRA varsity team. During his time with SRA he coached 2 women’s varsity boats to earn a National and North American Championship. Catalano will begin his position in mid-August.

*The Saratoga Rowing Association Saratoga Rowing Association's mission is to provide education, training, instruction and participation in the art of rowing to the youth and adults of Saratoga Springs and the surrounding communities; to support and encourage the sport of rowing within the principles and standards of amateur rule; to educate the public on, and make available to them, the advantages of rowing in pursuit of good health and physical development; to provide a recreational outlet for young people; and to organize, sponsor and promote participation in amateur competition through regattas.*

*. [www.saratogarowing.com](http://www.saratogarowing.com)*