

Sunny Marina del Rey, on the coast of southern California, is the home of Whitehall Rowing & Sail's first rowing club franchise. It's managed by Port Alberni transplant Diana Turner, seen here going for a row in one of the club boats.



WHITEHALL SPIRIT ROWING

Whitehall Rows to U.S. Docks

For more than 20 years, Whitehall Rowing & Sail — which recently moved from Esquimalt to the former Trotac Marine site on the Dallas Road waterfront — made waves around the world with its innovative Whitehall Spirit slide-seat sculling boats. Now owners Harold Aune and Marie Hutchinson are boosting the brand's profile even higher — and attracting people who can't afford their own boats to the sport — with a rowing club franchise program that's taken off in Victoria and expanded to southern California.

The Whitehall Spirit Rowing Club of Marina del Rey launched in mid-January and is Whitehall's first U.S. franchise. Diana Turner, originally from Port Alberni, is the club manager. She worked in marketing at the Fairmont Empress in Victoria and frequently rowed with Aune before relocating to Marina del Rey to oversee the franchise, which is owned by American couple Steven and Amy Phinny.

The club has already attracted 60 members, Turner tells *Douglas*. "We're really happy," she says. "Starting in winter, we weren't sure what to expect."

Aune says Whitehall is keen to work with potential franchisees in Seattle, San Francisco, and San Diego and has set up a website specifically tailored to people interested in the business opportunity.

Whitehall club fleets consist of single-position Solo 14 and double-

position Tango 17 boats, says Aune. Just like the Whitehall club at Victoria's CANOE marina, the boats are located on a purpose-built dock complete with safety gear, ready to go when members arrive for their pre-arranged rowing sessions, which can be booked online or even via smartphone. Aune explains that the efficiency of the club model makes it possible to charge rates well below those found in standard rental businesses. Hourly fees are modest, ranging from \$10 to \$20, and a trainer is available to get new members started.

"Anyone who is looking for a new way to build core strength and overall muscle tone, and who wants to burn calories quickly, will find regular rowing in a Whitehall Spirit sculling boat is the best," says Amy Phinny.

"Club members also like the fact that the boats are roomy, buoyant, and stable enough for them to bring along a friend, family member, or even a water-savvy dog for the experience," Aune adds.

The Marina del Rey club offered a \$25 introductory package that included a lesson and DVD on proper slide-seat rowing techniques hosted by Canadian Olympic champion Adam Kreek. Under the Whitehall franchise model, members do not pay monthly or annual fees — they're charged only for the time they spend on the water using the club boats.

See www.wsrfranchise.com.