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Sailing from the shore

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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SENECA — The decision to move away from their home on the Florida coast was bittersweet.

In the early 2000s, numerous hurricanes pounded the area surrounding Santa Rosa, ending with Hurricane Ivan ravaging anything the Wallace family had left.

"It was just time to go," said Eddie Wallace.

So, the family moved to the Upstate, settling here for good in 2005.

But beyond the comfort Eddie and his wife Tammy got from being out of harm's way, there was something missing.

"I missed the coast," he said. "I missed sailing. I missed the water."

During their 22 plus years in Florida, Eddie considered himself a sailing enthusiast. He enjoyed heading out on the water with friends. He enjoyed the peacefulness.

"You rely on the wind," he said. "It's no petroleum-based adventure. It's bare bones, back to basics. I loved that."

Around the time they moved to the Upstate, Eddie visited Tennessee and left with a new lease on his sailing life.

"This man had a really nice sailboat that was connected to a remote control," he added. "I just sat there and watched him navigate the boat for hours."

Even though it wasn't the same experience as physically being on the boat, Wallace was hooked.

Apparently, so are thousands of other people across the nation.

From leisure cruises on calm lake waters to feverishly racing the boats in organized Regattas, remote-controlled (RC) sailboat enthusiasts are increasing in numbers.

"I was really surprised at how popular this hobby was and even more surprised that there wasn't more interest here. I don't know a single person that enjoys this hobby like I do in the Upstate," he said.

For anyone looking to join in on the fun, a Laser RC sailboat, the most popular of all RC boats according to Wallace, will run about $450 while the remote controls run from $30 to $200.

"I'm helping my son buy one now," he added. "It's cool to have my kids get into this too. If I can't be out in a sailboat, this is certainly the next best thing. I can and will sit out with my boat for hours at a time.'

Currently, Wallace enjoys putting his boat in at South Cove Park on Lake Keowee in Seneca.

"It's calm and quiet out there," he said. "Just right."

While Wallace worked in emergency services in Florida for years, he became a bit overwhelmed by all the technology in which he was constantly immersed.

"Computers, radios, phones, scanners," he said. "I don't have to deal with any of that while I'm out here. It's not about today's standards with toys. It's old school."

Although Wallace doesn't race his pride and joy on the water, he said that hardcore sailors will race their boats in very rough conditions.

"The popularity of these RC boats really originated in Europe," he said. "They race their boats in water that I wouldn't want to tackle in a real boat, let alone an RC sailboat."

The boats do not have motors. Instead, just a mechanism to pull or loosen the sails and a rudder that controls the direction.

"Just like on a real boat, you must rely on nature to give you a push," he said.

And because the wind isn't blowing constantly, it can be a little frustrating.

"Earlier this morning, the wind wasn't around at all," he said. "It's at those times that you pop open a soda and look around at your scenery. Take it all in. Enjoy it."

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FOR THE JOURNAL

Racing remote-controlled sailboats is a very popular hobby worldwide.



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Eddie Wallace said one of the most enjoyable things about remote-controlled sailing is the peace and quiet.