

FACES IN THE CROWD

# League City man has a passion for sailing

By Paul R. Kopenkoskey

Growing up, Nolan Vander Haagen considered the spray of water in his face an opportunity to enjoy a sense of autonomy.

"When I was a teenager, the first opportunity I had after I started working to be independent from other people was to be on the water," the League City resident said.

"To be on the water with family and friends on their boats is not the same thing as when you are the captain of the boat, when you decide when you want to go and where you want to go," he said.

Vander Haagen was living in Puerto Rico when,

## ABOUT NOLAN VANDER HAAGEN

AGE: 56

OCCUPATION: General manager of West Marine store in Clear Lake

### COMMUNITY CONNECTION:

Resident of League City

**FAST FACT:** Vander Haagen was 17 and living in Puerto Rico when he purchased a small sailboat for \$125, then — with a friend, some sandwiches and a tent — sailed to small islands off the coast of Puerto Rico to spend the weekend.

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wiches and a tent — sailed to islands off the coast of Puerto Rico to spend the weekend.

"It's amazing ... a 40-pound boat for \$125, how much joy and experience it can bring to you," Vander Haagen said.

"The joy is accomplishing getting from point A to point B safely. This is a very small boat, and I used to go to the east coast of Puerto Rico from some keys, which is open water," Vander Haagen said. "And when I reached my destination, which was maybe 3 or 5 miles away, people would see me and ask if I came all the way here in that little thing."

Vander Haagen chuckles as he recounts those



Contributed photo

**Nolan Vander Haagen's love of the water has led him to kayak in Monterey Bay and sail around the Gulf Coast and in most Texas lakes.**

early years of sailing, but tempers it with how daunting it felt to be on

the open water. "Let me tell you, most of the time, it was re-

ally scary," says Vander Haagen, general manager of the 25,000-square-foot West Marine store in the Clear Lake area.

"Your mind starts playing tricks on you," he said. "It showed me more respect for the water and more respect for the weather."

Since then, Vander Haagen has kayaked in Monterey Bay, sailed all around the Gulf Coast and in most Texas lakes, and powerboated and fished in Tampa Bay and throughout the Caribbean. He has owned three sailboats, including two catamarans and four powerboats.

He also scuba-dives and snorkels, but he hasn't surfed — yet.

"Never say never," he said.

*Paul R. Kopenkoskey is a freelance writer. He can be reached at neighborhoods@chron.com.*

## VOLUNTEER HOUSTON

### Make blankets for abused and sick children

Create blankets for infants and small children. The local chapter of a national all-volunteer organization specializes in creating blankets for seriously ill or traumatized youngsters, including pediatric cancer patients. You can do the work at home and on your own schedule, and the number you make is completely up to you.

### Aid patients, families in hospice program

Care and consolation are provided to terminally

### How to help

Volunteer Houston features a variety of local volunteer opportunities in the community. For more information, call 713-965-0031 from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. **Additional opportunities:** www.volunteerhouston.org

ill people and their families through a hospice program serving southeast Houston and adjacent areas.

Working with a team of professionals, you can play a key role in this process by functioning as a friend and resource to a patient during the final stages of illness and counseling with family members during the bereavement process.

Comprehensive training will be provided.

### Guides needed at nature center near Baytown

Lead tours at a large nature center near Baytown. You'll receive training from people with expertise on environmental issues and habitats typical to our area of the state. Volunteer shifts can be arranged for weekdays or weekends.

### Foreign exchange hosts needed for new school year

Now is the time of year that a local chapter of a foreign exchange pro-

gram is getting ready to close out its placements of high school students for the fall semester. If placements with greater Houston-area families cannot be arranged in the next few weeks, some of these youngsters might lose out on the chance to attend school in the U.S. during the coming semester. Call now to take advantage of this exciting cultural opportunity.

### Help tend to garden for local food pantry

A garden in Kemah helps stock the food pantry of a faith-based agency helping the needy in southeast Harris County. Help keep the garden healthy and productive; you'll have a great deal of flexibility in scheduling times to drop by. Individuals, families and organized groups are welcome.

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