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## His credo: Be captain of your own ship

by [Paul R. Kopenkoskey](#) | July 27, 2012 3:10 pm



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, as well as powerboat and fish in Tampa Bay and

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, at age 17, he purchased a small sailboat for \$125 and -- with a friend, some sandwiches 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

throughout the Caribbean.

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 three or five 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 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 really 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.

#### ABOUT NOLAN VANDER HAAGEN

AGE: 56

OCCUPATION: General manager of West Marine store in Clear Lake

CONNECTION: Resident of League City

FAST FACT: Vander Haagen was 17 years old 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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