

The Paul Washburn Award

"For the love of the sport"

Steve Washburn has been coming to Acura Key West for nearly a decade as a volunteer member of the race committee. The California native does it for the love of the sport.

Washburn instilled that attitude in his three sons – Steve, Chris and Paul – while raising them in Long Beach. Whether cruising to Catalina Island aboard their Columbia 52 *Gypsy* or racing their B-25 *T-Rex* in West Coast events, the Washburns made sure to enjoy the experience on the water.

Paul, the youngest, truly loved sailing and it showed at a young age when he was named "Outstanding Beginning Sailor" at Alamitos Bay Yacht Club. He became an avid Sabot racer – not because of his success on the race course, but rather due to his pronounced love for the aesthetic side of the sport.

"Paul has a big smile on his face in every picture we have of him sailing," Steve Washburn said.

Paul Washburn died suddenly of natural causes last year, just one day after competing in the annual Alamitos Bay Yacht Club inverted start race. To honor his son, Steve Washburn has established an annual perpetual award that will be given for sportsmanship prior to the start of racing at Acura Key West.

Veteran Melges 24 sailor Bruce Ayres is the inaugural recipient of the The Paul Washburn Award: For the Love of the Sport. Ayres, a resident of Newport Beach, Cal., does not come to Key West motivated by winning races or capturing trophies. Rather, Ayres attends the prestigious regatta because he loves to sail and compete while challenging himself against the best in the world.

"It is very, very special to be the first individual to receive this award because I grew up with Steve and knew Paul," Ayres said. "I understand what it means to lose a child because my brother lost his son at age 14 in a car accident."

Ayres was among some 300 friends and family who attended Paul Washburn's funeral service, a turnout that stunned his grieving father. Seeing how many people his son touched in 10 years of life convinced Steve Washburn to memorialize Paul.

"Paul affected a lot of folks...they were just naturally drawn to him because of his enthusiasm and infectious personality," Steve Washburn said. "God needed an angel and he took Paul, but I wanted to have him remembered in a positive way."

Ayres has competed in 11 of the last 12 editions of Acura Key West – only missing 2006 due to injury. The 51-year-old Californian, whose company operates a chain of hotels, placed second overall in 1998 and has routinely finished Top 10 in the fleet. He is annually placed top three among Corinthian skippers in the ultra-competitive class.

However, Ayres does not make the cross-country trek to Key West for fame, glory or trophies. He developed a passion for sailing as a youngster while campaigning the family keelboats on the West Coast and that passion will persist forever.

"We do well on occasion and that is always a thrill. However, we compete for the pure enjoyment, the basic essence, of the sport," said Ayres, whose crew from his early years in the Melges 24 class remains virtually intact.

"I believe firmly in the theme of competing for the love of the sport. The most important rule on our boat is to have fun," Ayres said.

Steve Washburn still races and cruises out of Alamitos Bay Yacht Club and often has sons Steve, 18 and Chris, 16, as crew. However, there will always be a void on the boat now that Paul is no longer part of the team.

"We were a true sailing family. My dream was to sail with my three boys while they were growing up and we had a ton of good times together," Steve said.



Bruce Ayres (L) accepts the inaugural Paul Washburn Award from Steve Washburn (R).