

# Philanthropists Hollan and Hettiger 'on board' as cofounders of Challenged America with Regatta 2010 fundraiser

By Lee Schoenbart

Carol Hollan rose to prominence and became part of local history as San Diego's first female board-certified plastic surgeon more than 25 years ago. However, Dr. Hollan is most proud of her role as first-mate to the captain's position when it comes to yachting with her paraplegic husband and veteran Bob Hettiger.

Together, Hollan and Hettiger were the driving philanthropic forces behind the formation of Challenged America, the volunteer-based program founded by disabled veterans in 1978 that teaches adaptive sailing for adults and kids with disabilities.

On June 11-12, Challenged America will partner with West Marine and present Regatta 2010 featuring the Commodore's Cup Challenge on Friday, followed by a dinner and auction, and concluding on Saturday with the Regatta on San Diego Bay. The cup challenge event is a first-to-finish race between commodores – any commodore, vice or staff commodore – of San Diego-based yacht clubs. Each yacht club must have two sailors on board, a skipper and passenger, with a commodore.

"Our keynote speaker is going to be Laura Schlessinger, who is a pretty good sailor herself and well known for her commentary on the radio," said Hollan, who joined the plastic surgery practice of Smoot, Smoot and Reza as a member of its medical team last month. "She's a nice fit because she'll be very entertaining, people know her and she's a competitive sailor who gets the whole point of this."

The point being, she said, "Bob became a sailor when he was rolling around Mission Bay seeing sailboats out there and thought that was a lot more fun than rolling around in a wheelchair on the land, so he talked some people into letting him get out on the water and bought a sailboat and learned how to sail."

One of those people Hettiger rolled with was disabled veteran and quadriplegic Urban Miyares. They became cofounders of Challenged America in 1978, which is now managed by the Disabled Businesspersons Association and governed by the all-volunteer board of directors.

Hollan said the nonprofit organization "supports taking people out (sailing) who could never conceive of going out.

"People get to experience being on the water and have some autonomy," she said, "they're not just riding along, they're actually sailing."

She noted that Challenged America also took on significant racing competition in 1991 since growing from an adaptive learning program and becoming competitive with sailors in San Diego.

"They've done the TRANSPAC twice, which is a yacht race from L.A. to Honolulu," she said.

Challenged America's goal of racing in the TRANSPAC was established in 1991, realized in 2005 and repeated in 2007. The B'Quest, a Tripp 40 racing sailboat donated to the program by Brian and Suzanne Hull of Coronado, raced 2,225 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean twice in three years.

"On that trip there was a blind man, a paraplegic, a quadriplegic, a man with one eye, one arm and one leg and a guy with rheumatoid arthritis," Hollan recalled. "By rules, they had to have one able-bodied person on board and there was one guy."

When asked if she was that able-bodied person, Hollan howled with laughter and said, "I would have been hanging over the edge," then admitted, "I'm just in love with the idea, the project and the outcome."

In nearly three decades, Challenged America has graduated from a Cal 20 sailboat purchased in 1978 for \$1,500 to a Santana 27 racing sailboat for \$15,000 and followed by a Beneteau First Class 10 racer for \$56,000 – all three donated by Hollan and Hettiger – to a fleet including eight Martin 16 sailboats, a Capri 22, a Nelson/Marek Custom 43 and a Kiwi 35.

About the boats, Hettiger said, "We take in donations, but we keep them for three years so that they can get their full



**Carol Hollan, San Diego's first female board-certified plastic surgeon, with her husband Bob Hettiger.**

value and then we sell them. That's one of the ways we can make money and the other is to have these fundraisers.

"We had 125 people and raised close to \$10,000," Hettiger said of last year's inaugural event. "Our guest speaker was Paul Cayard, he's one of the top sailors in the world and winner of the Whitbread, which is an around-the-world race."

This year's goal, he said, is to double the attendance and perhaps triple the funds raised.

The regatta will be followed by Challenged America's participation in the June 19-20 San Diego Wooden Boat Festival and then the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic Sept. 18-24.

For the third September in a row, Challenged America will participate in the sports clinic, which has its beginnings in San Diego. Recently-disabled veterans come from across the United States to participate in a variety of sporting venues during the one-week competition.

"It's a program that includes bicycling and surfing. Our contribution is the sailing aspect of it and they actually go out in the boats and sail themselves with a competent sailor," Hollan said. "And that's part of it, to see what is possible when you didn't think something was possible."

"We serve about 125 vets," Hettiger said. "Wounded vets that came back from Afghanistan and Iraq who were injured similarly to how we were injured."

Challenged America will continue to provide the sailing venue for the clinic throughout the week at the Marriott Hotel and Marina for the next several years.

Thirty-two years after Challenged America's formation, Hollan reflected, "The creation of the possibility where people believed there was none," is what gives her the most satisfaction.

Challenged America's sailing office in Shelter Cove Marina at 2240 Shelter Island Drive in San Diego.

To learn more, visit [www.challengedamerica.org](http://www.challengedamerica.org).

For information about the race, visit <http://wmcaregatta.com>. For reservations, call (619) 523-9318 and email [Ahoy@ChallengedAmerica.org](mailto:Ahoy@ChallengedAmerica.org). Dr. Hollan's website is [www.carolhollanmd.com](http://www.carolhollanmd.com).