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Luxury Living in Tampa Bay

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What's SUP?

By Susan B. Barnes

You may have seen them gliding atop the waters of the Bay area—in downtown Tampa, along the Intercoastal, out in the Gulf. They're not surfing; they're not windsurfing; they're not kiteboarding. What is it that they're doing?

They're stand up paddling, or SUP!

Though it's hard to tell when stand up paddling evolved from surfing, or vice versa, it's often credited to Duke Kahanamoku—a 1912, 1920 and 1924 Hawaiian Olympic medalist and “the father of modern surfing”—and the Waikiki Beach Boys. These beach boys didn't sing of California girls, though—they taught visitors to surf and oftentimes paddled out into the waters to take photos of surfers. On surfboards. With paddles. Stand up paddling.

Dr. Patrick Klemawesch of St. Petersburg first got involved in stand up paddling when in Malibu interviewing for a residency position in 2005. He went into a local surf shop to rent a board, hoping to catch a few waves.

“It was my one chance to surf Malibu and it was flat,” recalled Klemawesch. “Not only flat, but unseasonably cold and rainy. I paddled out, and was the only person out at Malibu.”

It was then that big wave surfer and surfing pioneer Laird Hamilton came out to do a paddle workout with his training partners. Klemawesch struck up a conversation with Hamilton, asked him about what he was doing and got hooked.

“It looked like so much fun,” said Klemawesch. “They were even catching two-inch waves and riding them in.”

He ordered a board as soon as he got back to Florida and has been stand up paddling since.

And he's not the only one. SUP has been increasing in popularity over the years—yours truly even tried it last summer. Klemawesch isn't surprised in the interest in the sport.

TAMPA BAY—SUP CAPITAL?

“The basic, year-round clement weather; the diversity of water types; and the sometimes difficult-to-access, really beautiful natural areas that we have [here in the Bay area] are all a combination of getting people hooked,” said Klemawesch.

He went on to add that you may have lived in St. Pete forever, gone to Davis Island or Fort DeSoto hundreds of times, but going out on a paddleboard is a different experience from a six-foot vantage from the water.

“There's splendor and beauty around us that can be accessed with minimal difficulty,” Klemawesch noted.

“It's a pretty bizaare sport—in a good way. It appeals to everybody, from a 70-year-old guy to a 7-year-old kid. They're excited [stand up paddling's] related to surfing, and it's cutting edge and cool.”



Dr. Patrick Klemawesch of St. Petersburg stand up paddles in the Gulf of Mexico and Intracoastal.

Brody Welte, owner of Stand Up Fitness and Kahuna Kai Paddle Shop, agrees.

Relocating from Hawaii where he was raised, he stopped in the area to visit friends on his way to an interview in South Florida.

“[We were] crossing the Howard Frankland Bridge and I looked around,” Welte said. “There was water everywhere, and flat water, which is conducive to the sport.”

He stayed a few days and explored the area. When he didn't get the job in South Florida—a *sign*—he started his stand up paddling business. According to Welte, no other place outside the state of Hawaii has the year-round temperatures, access to water and culture based around water like the Bay area does. He foresees the area being the top two or three places in the U.S. to paddle—if not the top—when it's all said and done.

The water culture Welte refers to is key to the growth of the sport.

“We have such a community of fitness enthusiasts that are eager to get into it,” said Klemawesch. “Once they've had their first taste and how subtly challenging it can be, they're in.”

“The sport is growing everywhere, and we're a microcosm for that,” he continued. “St. Pete really is one of the national, and even international, hot spots with the number of sanctioned race events that we have here, and with the really cool community of people.”

SO WHO ARE STAND UP PADDLERS?

“It's a pretty bizaare sport—in a good way,” said Welte. “It appeals to everybody, from a 70-year-old guy to a 7-year-old kid. They're excited. Stand up paddling is related to surfing, and it is cutting edge and cool.”

Welte also sees an increasing number of women getting into the sport, and racing, too.

Klemawesch notes that some of the most devoted paddlers around the area are in their 50s and 60s.

“My dad paddles several times a week,” he said. “I got him hooked on it, and he races locally. He's radical!”

Clockwise: Family fun SUP style. Brody Welte developed a workout program that benefits stand up paddlers. Catching a wave, SUP-style. Preparing for a day on the water.

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SUP—IT DOES A BODY GOOD

With all the fun to be had with stand up paddling, it may be easy to forget that it is a workout at the same time, developing core strength and balance.

“You get out of it what you put into it,” said Klemawesch. “It's possible to do a paddleboard workout where you're working mostly upper body, or a leg workout.”

He also notes that several area outfitters offer fitness classes with a boot camp mentality—train on land and in water, incorporate yoga and even Pilates into the workout and try to focus on the goal of the day.

For the more experienced paddlers, as far as distance paddling/race training, SUP is the supreme total body workout, according to Klemawesch. And he should know—he's the first person from the gulf to successfully stand up paddle solo across the Ka'iwi Channel, and he's training for the 32-Mile Molokai-Oahu Paddleboard Race in July.

Welte echoes the total body workout benefit, noting that most people feel it in their legs (quads, calves and feet) and core due to constant stabilizing, but that the power of propulsion primarily comes from the core.



Stand up paddling offers a different perspective of bay area waters.

READY TO DIVE IN?

If you're ready to give it a go, Klemawesch suggests first determining your level of comfort in the water, and your level of fitness. As far as conditioning, he first suggests yoga; then any board sport (i.e. surf, snow, skate); and finally anything involving the water to affirm comfort and respect.

For people who are total novices—who have never surfed or skateboarded or done any board sport—he suggests contacting one of the local shops to take an introductory lesson.

“If you're a little more comfortable, the really great thing about the sport is, either

borrow, or rent, or buy a board and a paddle and go out and learn,” Klemawesch said. “As with any new sport, try it out first with a friend or renting a board.”

After your first foray into stand up paddling, if it's something you're interested in learning more about, Welte suggests taking a lesson to learn correct form and paddle stroke.

“If taught by a qualified instructor on the right equipment, I believe that everyone can have a great time, and that is the whole goal,” said Welte.

Once you become hooked, buying the equipment is as easy as one, two... well,

that's it. Boards range from a couple of hundred dollars to just under \$2,000, and paddles around \$200 and up.

When ready to buy, Welte suggests talking with a local retailer to determine which board and paddle will work best for what you want to do. Much like bicycling, a casual rider wouldn't want to buy a bike built for racing.

If you're looking to switch up your workout routine, try something new, or just go out for a day on the water, try stand up paddling. It'll give you a whole new perspective of the waters and natural beauty that surround us. DR



GET YOUR BOARD AT ANY OF THESE LOCAL SHOPS AND GO!

Kahuna Kai Paddle Shop

Inside Reno Beach Surf Shop
1031 4th Street North
Brody Welte: (727) 260-2362
www.standupfitnessinc.com

Solstice Sports

1100 N. 50th St., Unit 1E, Tampa
Nick Bjork: 800-320-WIND
www.solsticesports.com

Suncoast Surf Shop

9841 Gulf Blvd., Treasure Island
Joe Nuzzo: (727) 367-2483
www.suncoastsurfshop.com

Surf Shack Surf Shop

5210 Gulf Blvd., St. Pete Beach
Greg Agerskov: (727) 367-9898
www.surfshacksurfshop.com

Urban Kai

Mike Conlee: (813) 598-1634
www.urbankai.com

Water Monkey Shop

1305 49th St. South, St. Petersburg
Chase Kosterlitz: (727) 481-3637
www.watermonkeyshop.com