**MEDIA RELEASE September 7, 2021**

**$31,500 OTF Grant Provides Enhanced Sailing Opportunities for Blind and Vision Impaired Sailors in the GTA**

**Toronto, ON:** **As a result of a $31,500 Capital grant awarded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 2019, the Blind Sailing Association of Canada (BSAC) has been able to upgrade aging equipment and make other enhancements to two of its sailboats. The capital upgrades which translate into more training opportunities for BSAC’s blind members, and have extended the boats’ lifespan, while also addressing some safety and functionality issues.**

**“As a long-time advocate for people with special needs and disabilities, it is wonderful to see this grant awarded to the Blind Sailing Association of Canada,” said Chris Glover, MPP for Spadina-Fort York. “We need to make our province fully accessible and this is a step in that direction. Everyone has a right to enjoy our city’s incredible waterfront and all it has to offer.”**

**Now in its 20th year, BSAC provides a robust sailing program to blind and vision impaired people in the GTA and beyond. Through a unique partnership involving sighted volunteer skippers and crew and vision impaired sailors, members have the opportunity to learn the sport of sailing, develop advanced sailing skills and go out regularly on half-day cruises around the Toronto harbour. They also have the opportunity to participate in a racing program with another Toronto yacht club and take extended weekend cruises. Some 35 vision impaired members, and a similar number of volunteers, are actively involved, going out on over 100 sails during a regular season (this has been somewhat reduced during COVID-19 restrictions).**

**“As someone who has been an active vision impaired sailor for 15 years now, I really appreciate the opportunity to develop my sailing skills through BSAC, which enables me to sail regularly from May until October,” said Chris Jonas, President of BSAC. “I particularly appreciate being able to hone my racing skills, including participating in local racing with a neighbouring yacht club.”**

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**“I strongly believe that our Blind Sailing program significantly contributes to developing friendships, learning new skills and developing confidence among blind participants who so often face social isolation and exclusion. We are very grateful to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for their generous contribution that has provided us with the resources to do these needed upgrades and enhancements,” added Jonas. “As a totally volunteer-run organization, we would not have been able to do this work without that support.”**

**BSAC owns three sailboats, a 22 foot and a 27-foot, both Catalinas, and a 30-foot Alberg that was recently donated to the Club. Major upgrades to the boats included new sails for both Catalina boats, installing an environmentally-friendly electric motor for the smaller boat (making it quieter and easier to use by volunteers), and adding an autohelm and GPS chart plotter for the larger boat to facilitate longer cruising on Lake Ontario. The Association has made further upgrades to enhance the boats’ functionality, like adding a tactile model boat that facilitates demonstrating sailboat parts and sailing techniques to new sailors, and even added a set of “doggy stairs” to help guide dogs, who often accompany people on sails.**

**Established in 2002, the objective of Blind Sailing Association of Canada is to provide opportunities for blind and vision impaired people in the GTA to learn and participate in the sport of sailing.**

**The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is an agency of the Government of Ontario, and one of Canada’s leading granting foundations. Last year, nearly $112M was invested into 1,384 community projects and partnerships to build healthy and vibrant communities and strengthen the impact of Ontario’s non-profit sector. In 2020/21, OTF supported Ontario’s economic recovery by helping non-profit organizations rebuild and recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Visit**[**otf.ca**](http://www.otf.ca/)**to learn more.**

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