

"This helps kids dream," says Horgan, with Andrew (far left) and other sailors.



SECOND WIND

Paralyzed as a young man, Harry Horgan helps disabled kids feel the freedom of the sea

Under a late-morning Miami sun, 8-year-old Santiago Chavez grins as he steers a motorized sailboat across Biscayne Bay. "I see an island!" he calls out to six fellow pint-size sailors.

A nautical adventure normally would be off-limits for Santiago, who has cerebral palsy, and the others, with disabilities ranging from missing limbs to spina bifida. Enter Harry Horgan, 49, paralyzed from the chest down weeks after graduating from college in 1980; a truck door he was leaning against opened and he spilled onto the road. A sailor since boyhood, he refused to give up the sea, and within a year was back

on a boat; his buddies would hoist him from his wheelchair. "Being on the water allowed me to feel good about myself," says Horgan, a married father of a 6-year-old son. "I wanted to do that for others."

Today, through his nonprofit Shake-A-Leg Miami, Horgan and his 24-person staff and 250 volunteers teach some 3,000 physically and mentally disabled kids and adults each year. Pro-

grams, which are free for special-needs and low-income participants, range from sailing and kayaking (on handicapped-accessible vessels) to marine science classes. "Harry is an inspiration—the kids realize if someone with special needs can do this, they can do anything they want," says Marsha Erdmann, a special-education teacher at Tropical Elementary in Miami. Margarita Murguido says her 10-year-old son Andrew Vega, who has cerebral palsy and started with Horgan two years ago, "is more independent now. When he comes back [from sailing] he is so happy."

And that, says Horgan, is the most important lesson of all. "It goes beyond the water," he says. "Now they can see the horizon."

By Kristin Harmel in Miami



Helped by staff, kids leave their wheelchairs behind for a while.

Know a hero? Send suggestions to HEROESAMONGUS@PEOPLEMAG.COM. For more information, go to www.shakealegmiami.org