

Hello everyone, I truly appreciate your presence here to celebrate this incredible organization, this really great sport, and two pretty fantastic people.

I'm Brandon Cheely, I'm the current Board President of BHRA, and I've been in this role for 2 ½ years.

The speakers before me talked about the history of BHRA and the impact that rowing had on their lives. This history and impact is consistently rooted in the **people** who were a part of this organization.

Rowing, specifically, seems to be a sport where participants stay involved for a very long time. The work ethic and determination that they've gained remains a part of them throughout their life, so it is especially great that their paths weave in and out of this organization.

I've been tasked with speaking about the future of BHRA. The next 30 years and beyond. We've obviously accomplished quite a bit in the past 30 years – this boathouse is incredible, there are tons of championship banners and plaques in it, and it's regularly filled with some amazing people – youth and Masters rowers, coaches, parents, volunteers.

So I AM going to be a little cliché in my talk about the future and start with the past. In the middle of seventh grade our son came home at the end of a season of a different sport and said “this is not my friend group, I need to find a different sport”. A friend of his had invited him to a learn to row day a little while before that,

and he really loved it. My wife and I had no prior exposure to rowing through high school and college. We knew NOTHING about the sport. But, it seemed like a good group of kids so we signed him up. It WAS a really good group of kids. We decided to get more involved – my wife was on the board for two years, I took over the role of Board President in 2021, and here we are today. I've seen the hard work that all of his teammates put in every day. I've seen the support and motivation they give each other when someone is down. The friends he's made here are keepers. All of the athletes we've seen pass through this boathouse are hardworking, wonderful kids.

It's about the **people**.

Covid hit the high school sports community hard. Teams couldn't practice, they couldn't recruit. The leadership of BHRA banded together to come up with solutions. Eileen and the rest of the board had weekly phone calls. Coach Kristen held the team together when we were able to practice again. We leased a fleet of singles to keep kids out on the water. Because of the foresight of the **people** involved, BHRA made it through with an intact, well-performing team.

It's also about the right people at the right time.

Andy Sayles, a Burnt Hills rower and 2008 graduate who spent time coaching at Albany Rowing and CRI in Boston, came back to the area in 2020 and joined us as the Director of Rowing for his former high school team. He and I, along with the rest of the current board, put together a plan for the team. We knew that we

needed the support of the school to pick recruiting back up, so we met with the Athletic Director of BHBL.

We laid out a proposal for communication and cooperation and said we'd meet with him again after the upcoming season with results. The following year we met with him, along with the Superintendent and the Board of Education of BHBL, to celebrate TWO state championships – our boys Varsity quad and our girls Junior quad. The girls went on to finish THIRD in the nation at Scholastic Nationals. The boys finished sixth at Scholastics and 19th in the country at Youth Nationals.

This past year we got to meet with the Board of Education again – our boys Varsity quad won another state championship and finished seventh at Scholastic Nationals. Our girls Varsity coxed four also went to Scholastic Nationals and finished eighth. These athletes have put in so much work and the results are fantastic.

To get the word out about our incredible program, facility, and athletes we opened our boathouse up to athletes from other school sports for our Winter training program. Half of our state champion girls Field Hockey team joined us for the first season. Lacrosse players, wrestlers, swimmers, football players – they've all come to our boathouse and experienced the BHRA vibe. They now know how hard our athletes work. After seeing the camaraderie and supportiveness, some of them also decided to join the crew team!

The **people** of BHRA are the best advertisement for why rowing is such an amazing sport.

This past Fall, in an effort to provide an even better rowing experience for our athletes now and in the future, BHRA and Friends of Shen Rowing decided to do a crazy thing. We merged our teams for the “club seasons” of Summer and Fall, starting out as BHS Crew and recently evolving into the Erie Canal Athletic Club (ECAC). Although this was a joining together of “rival teams”, the people involved have consistently kept the focus on whatever would create the best rowing experience for the athletes. Our first joint regatta was the Head of the Hudson – we won the overall points trophy. We competed at Overpeck this summer and brought home a bunch of top finishes. Our athletes went to the Canadian Henley for the first time in years – FOUR of our boats made it to the Finals! We had a second place finish from the U17 boys quad, and all of our rowers made it to at least one semifinal. The kids meshed together so quickly, it really was a wonderful thing to see.

It's about the **people**.

We've added new boats to our fleet – now most of the kids aren't rowing in boats that are older than they are! We've upgraded oars and ergs and added BikeErgs to further challenge our athletes. We've turned a tragedy into a reason to be hopeful. In 2021 we lost a former rower, Judson Rudgers. A celebration of life was held at this boathouse, a place that he loved. His family created a scholarship fund in his name, which would ensure that no future rower would miss out on this wonderful sport because of financial concerns.

Since then, that fund has provided assistance for over 20 rowers who otherwise would not have had the chance to push themselves to the limit – to grow – to support others – and to be part of something great.

Our **people** have made BHRA what it is today.

And SO – we look to the future. **We** are all the current “**people**” of BHRA and ECAC. What can we do to honor the hard work our predecessors put in? What can we do to ensure continued improvement? What can we do to provide the best experience for the rowers of the future? Think about that when you leave here today.

We are positioning the Erie Canal Athletic Club to create a resurgence in rowing on the Mohawk. We have created a place where athletes from Schenectady and Scotia can once again join in the great experience that our BHRA and Shen athletes have always had. With the excellent coaching talent we have accumulated, ECAC will compete with the big clubs of the northeast. We already heard whispers from spectators at the Henley as they watched our boats qualify for semifinal after semifinal – “Who is this BHS Crew team?”

We will continue to make smart investments in equipment for the team. The popularity of our Winter Training with BHBL athletes has allowed us to purchase those additional ergs and BikeErgs I mentioned. With the state championships we’ve won and the recognition and support from the BHBL school district, I predict even more interest in our training opportunities.

Success breeds success. Good people attract more good people.

Coach Andy has created a fantastic partnership with Wintech and King Racing. As our athletes put in the hard work and raise their skill levels, we must ensure that their equipment is up to the challenge. Wintech and King provided us with free demo boats for some of our biggest races, and we are working with them on options to update even more of our fleet.

And finally, to all of the current rowers in the audience. Continue to work hard, continue to support your teammates. Continue to be a positive example in your school. Show everyone that rowers are driven, welcoming, inclusive, and amazing. Take that “never quit” attitude with you to work or college. Wear your BHRA, ECAC, and Shen unis to practice when you row somewhere else. Go into the world and DO. GREAT. THINGS. And remember that **you** are the **people** of BHRA too. When your path intersects with us again, find a way – big or small – to give back for all the great experiences you’ve had here. Maybe one of you will be standing in my spot at the 60th anniversary celebration.

Thank you again to all of you for your contributions, it’s been an honor to be one of the people of BHRA.