

Catching some winds

Kite boarding is next extreme sport for Long Beachers

By ARIELLA MONTI

On virtually any breezy Long Beach afternoon, after the lifeguards head home, beachgoers can find kite boarders prepping for a ride.

"Take the adrenaline of every sport you've ever done and just pack it into one activity," said Michael Rusoff, explaining his experiences as a Long Beach kiter.

Using a board that resembles a snowboard, riders attach themselves to a 10 meter-long kite by a harness and use a bar to steer, similar to water skiing. Kites can surf the waves, jump and soar 30 feet in the air or ride across still water.

During summer, Long Beach kites are not permitted to ride the beach until after the lifeguards have finished their shift. With the large kites, which are attached to an 80-foot line, for kites to safely launch and land their kites they need a clear radius of about 160 feet, Rusoff explained.

While ideal conditions vary for each kiter, Rusoff finds the best days are those with onshore or north winds of 10 to 15 miles per hour with an air temperature of 90 degrees. While he has kited in winds as light as seven miles per hour, he prefers 35 to 45.

When Rusoff started kiting six years ago, he recalled he was one of just a few enthusiasts on the water, but locally the sport has since grown to include 15 to 20 regular riders. "I was looking for a new sport to do," said Rusoff, a former surfer, snowboarder and rock climber. "I came down to the beach and I saw two guys kiting and just knew that was it."

After becoming an avid kiter, Rusoff opened Cosmic Kites, at 74 W. Park Ave. in Long Beach, and began selling gear worldwide.

While not yet a globetrotting kiter, Rory Swihart of Long Beach was introduced to the sport seven years ago when he lived in Texas. Swihart admits his skills were sub-standard before he moved to Long Beach

three years ago, but after meeting Rusoff on the beach he was bit by the kiting bug. Swihart moved away from surfing to kiting mainly because of the extended ride time.

"If you see how long a surfer can ride a wave, it's usually five to 10 seconds," said Swihart who tries to ride once a week. "Whereas with kite boarding you're going for an hour straight until you take a break. You're constantly getting to ride."

Extreme sport enthusiast Joe Decunzo also hung up his surfboard when he began kiting two years ago. "Surfing was getting boring, especially around here," said Decunzo, who watched kiteboarders in Long Beach. "Once I saw it and I watched these guys for a little while, I said 'you know what, that's gotta be for me.'"

The selling point for Decunzo was the ability to jump 35 feet in the air. Asked why he was drawn to the sport, he replied, "Just because of the type of speed, the jumps and women love it," Decunzo said laughing.

Jarett Treuhaft, a loyal sufferer who doesn't plan on giving up the sport anytime soon, is

a self-described sports nut who is always looking for another sport to take to the extreme.

He said kiteboarding is a lot harder than it looks. He started by using a trainer kite two years ago after he realized the constant wind makes Long Beach the optimal place for kiting.

"When you harness the power of the wind and nature, it's a big rush," said Treuhaft, who noted that his kite broke recently and he's anxious to get back out in the water.

Rusoff said that while the sport is becoming more widespread, the high costs generally deter people from getting started. While the price of the gear varies, he said the average 170-pound male will spend \$1,800 to \$2,500 for equipment, and he strongly urges any beginner to take professional lessons to avoid serious injury.

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Courtesy John Black

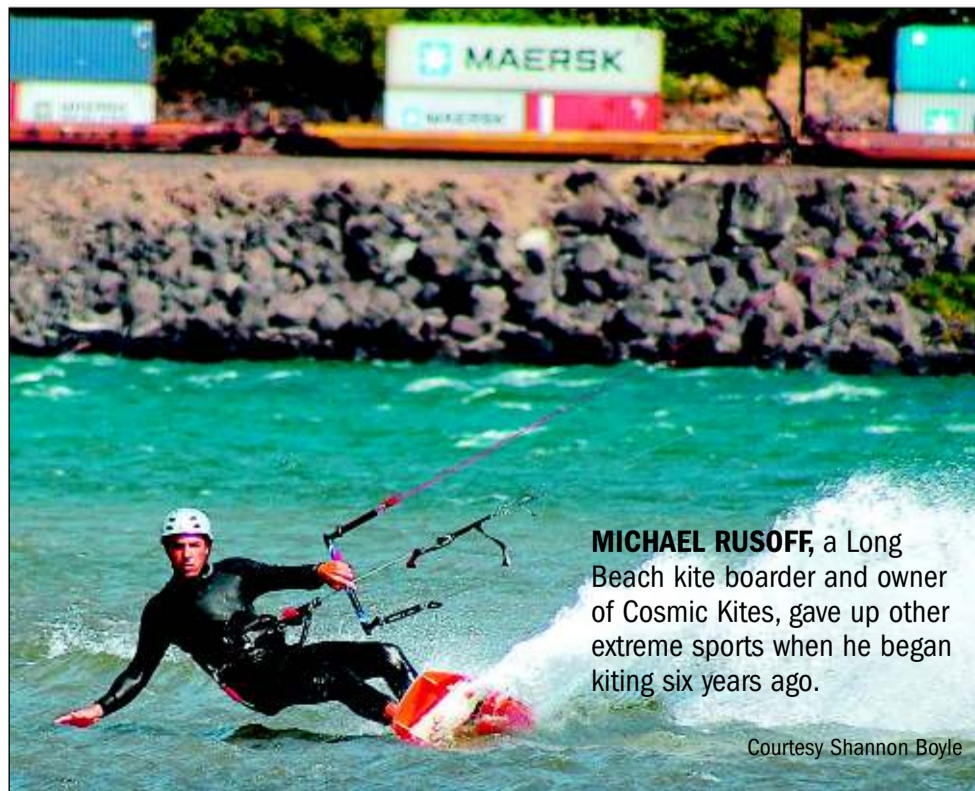
USING A HARNESS to strap themselves to a 10-meter long kite, kite boarders are able to jump 35 feet in the air and ride in 45 miles per hour winds.



LENNY MANZO

from Long Beach is back on shore after an evening of kiting.

Arthur Findlay/Herald



MICHAEL RUSOFF, a Long Beach kite boarder and owner of Cosmic Kites, gave up other extreme sports when he began kiting six years ago.

Courtesy Shannon Boyle