

# BOARDRIDER OF THE MONTH

## ROD RODGERS



**This month's "Boardrider of the Month" was born in Puerto Rico and has lived in Maryland for 40 years, but his local connections run deep.**

Rod Rodgers' first trip to the Space Coast was in January 1980, when he and his wife rode the train down to Orlando, rented a car, and stayed in Cocoa Beach for ten days.

"It was a surprise to me that a wetsuit was needed," Rodgers laughs. "I rode several breaks from 2nd Light down to Sebastian Inlet and loved the beaches and the relative tranquility of the area. A lot has changed in the past 30 years!"

"My parents live in Central Florida, nowhere near the beach, so I suggested we meet them halfway by renting a condo at the beach. We try to do this a couple times each year with Satellite Beach as our destination. It's less hectic than Cocoa Beach, I like paipo surfing the reefs, and everyone loves Da Kine Diego's. One of my young surfer buddies from Maryland lives in Satellite Beach, so it's not uncommon to extend my visits with he and his family. Over the last decade, there have been



many opportunities to develop new relationships in the Space Coast area."

The first of those influential relationships began after meeting Logjammer, the name by which fellow paipo enthusiast and beloved Cocoa Beach fixture Chris Harazda was affectionately known. "It began when Chris emailed me on March 25, 2003, confessing, 'I love my little paipo,'" Rodgers recalls. "I would say that was a great start to our continuing relationship."

Chris passed away unexpectedly five years ago after a surf session in Jupiter, but Rodgers carries on his legacy and his love of paipos through the Paipo Research Project, a formidable undertaking that requires long hours of research, documentation, and far-reaching interviews.

We spoke with him about the Project and what might make the unassuming paipo the board of both the past and the future.

### **How did the Paipo Research Project first come about?**

In a sense, the Paipo Research Project journey started in the winter of 2000 with Neal "Sponge" Miyake, who noted that the paipo/bellyboarding presence on the Internet was rather lean and encouraged me to create a web page. The initial web page came together over a snowy couple of lock-in days at home... and continued to evolve through the help and support of people



worldwide. The paipo forums started up in January 2004, and it was on the paipo forums that people with like interests started to connect and talk about all things paipo. Several forum participants kept things lively with postings from '60s-era surf magazines and with questions about the origin and history of paipo surfing. But it wasn't until some of these same protagonists began a series of posts in Spring of 2009, loosely called "The Paper Trail," and posed simple questions that the quest began in earnest. By Summer 2009, Bob Green and I decided to formalize the research effort by laying out a general research path focused around conducting interviews and reviewing surf-related publications. Bob has been our paipo surfing interview leader, and I've focused on reviewing the literature of surfing.

## What do you like best about them?

Unlike many prone riders, I started out as a foot surfer, initially riding a longboard, and then, within a year, a shortboard. Increasingly I found myself riding a paipo board and bodysurfing in nice open-face waves. In the pre-leash days we welcomed the security of riding a paipo board in really large (like in Tres Palmas) or ferocious waves (Gas Chambers). But when all is said and done, what moved me to kipapa-style surfing was the increased freedom of the ride and closeness to the wave and water surface, the sheer joy and excitement of skimming across the surface of the wave. There are also many practical reasons for riding a paipo. A very small board made it easy to use the main public transportation system in Puerto Rico -- the publicos, or public cars (basically taxi cab-style cars that drove a bus route). My paipo easily fit into a car trunk! During the past 30 years there has been a significant cost advantage when traveling by air. Boards are less expensive. Another practical advantage is that my lower body strength favors using my legs and swim fins instead of my arms for paddling. But it all comes down to the pure joy of it.

## How did the Cocoa Beach Surf Museum get connected with the Project?

They played an instrumental role in kicking off the surfing magazine research. Prior to a November 2009 trip to the Space Coast, I emailed the CBSM asking about the availability of magazines to review. Tony Sasso, Executive Director, enthusiastically replied that the Museum would be happy to support the paipo research efforts. John Hughes, the president, and Sean O'Hare, curator, have been very supportive in my many family and research trips. I can't say enough about how supportive John has been in making magazines available, lining up scanners and introducing me to others, and sharing surf sessions ... So far, CBSM has been the source of 60 of the 205 magazines reviewed and has enabled me to focus on rare, hard-to-find magazines... They've also been instrumental in putting me in contact with area board collectors, such as Roy Scafidi and Menno Van Schagen. Last, but not least, the CBSM is to be commended for hosting the Chris Harazda Memorial Paipo Expression Session as part of the annual Waterman's Challenge, providing a forum for paipo riders to gather and join the larger surfrider community.

## What have been some of the challenges so far in carrying out the Project?

The biggest challenge is tracking down and interviewing people who were instrumental in developing and riding the paipo designs of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of these early pioneers are getting up in years and memories are fading, or have died. Thankfully, we have a great team to assist Bob Green

and I, some very talented people who we are fortunate to have making contributions to the project. Another challenge is gaining access to old surf magazines -- more a function of locale than access -- as most of the older, rare, or less common magazine collections are in Southern California. An additional challenge is gaining access to rare publications that reside in university library special collections that are not available via interlibrary loan. Of course, this means I have to travel to the source! On the flip side, people from across the surf community have been supportive in so many ways. Collectors, traders, and surf historians such as Joe Tabler and Matt Warshaw have assisted in fact checking and identifying sources of information. Email shows up in my inbox with articles or scanned images of paipo surfing from early in the 20th century from around the world that appeared on unexpected formats such as post cards or jigsaw puzzles.

## Tell us a bit about your relationship with Chris and Jan Harazda.

After that first email from him, it would be almost two years before we met in person, during what was to become the first of many regular trips to the Space Coast. I met Jan that night at a Surfrider Foundation fundraiser at Da Kine Diego's. Tumak, as he was known on the paipo forums, always had a positive, inquiring mind, so he was wonderful to be around and to converse with on the phone, forums, and email. Logjammer, as Chris was also known, tells of his love for riding paipo boards in this online article: <http://weareh2o.com/weareh2o/driftng/spring2006/totalinvolvement.htm>. Jan and I usually try to catch some waves at the local breaks when I'm visiting. She

carries on the stoke!

## What do you see in the spot's future?

Kipapa-style surfing in all of its forms will be around forever. It is one of the oldest forms of surfriding. The last half dozen years has witnessed the rediscovery of a range of surfriding forms outside the conventional shortboarding and longboarding worlds -- an era of experimentation reminiscent of the late '60s and early '70s -- bodysurfing, handboarding, matt surfing, alaia-style surf boarding and paipo surfing.

## How can people help with the Project?

One aspect of the project is photographing paipo/bellyboards, taking board measurements, and documenting a story behind the board. We are also interested in documenting the history of paipo history throughout the world including the Space Coast. Are there paipo builders in the area? Do you have any paipo-related memorabilia? If so, please contact me! And consider making a donation from your collection to the CBSM.

*For more information on the Paipo Research Project, visit [www.mypaipoboard.org](http://www.mypaipoboard.org). You can email Rod at [paipodude@mypaipoboard.org](mailto:paipodude@mypaipoboard.org) or visit his site at [www.rodndtube.com/](http://www.rodndtube.com/)*

