

# International Lightning Class Association

April 10, 2026

For Immediate Release

Tarpon Springs, FL

Since the inception of the International Lightning Class Boat Grant Program in 2007, **over 55 young teams** have enjoyed the incredible level of racing and camaraderie the Lightning Class offers. A number of these teams continue to actively race and own boats in the class today.

The Lightning Class is proud to announce four 2026 Boat Grant teams!

“Our 2026 teams are a mix of recent and current strong collegiate sailors, underscoring the Class’s focus on encouraging young sailors to continue their involvement in one-design racing after college,” stated program co-chair Ryan Davidson.

**Beatrice Lazarski** and her teammates **Penelope Casper** and **Elena Proos** hail from Milwaukee, WI. Working at the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center and participating in Fleet 79’s weekly summer races, all three sailors have quickly fallen in love with the Lightning Class. Bea and Penelope both graduated from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. The team is very excited to welcome Lightning Class members when they come to Milwaukee for the Women’s (Junior and Masters) North American Championships in August. The team will be mentored by Jared Drake, Fleet 79.



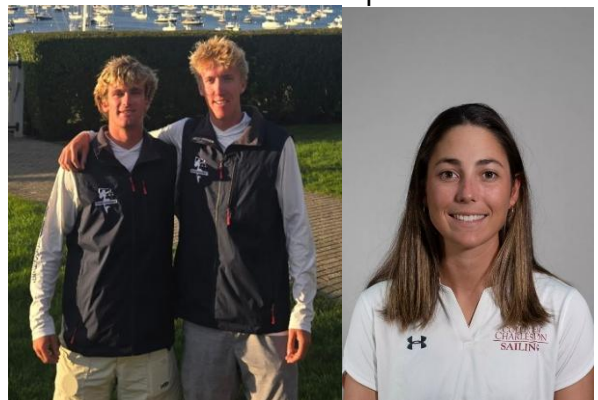
*“We are very honored and excited to have received this [Lightning Boat] Grant! We’re looking forward to the summer already, and can’t wait to get started sailing in the Lightning Class. This is a great opportunity to expand our skills, and grow as sailors. See you on the water!” – Beatrice Lazarski*

(L-R) Beatrice Lazarski, Elena Proos, Penelope Casper

College of Charleston collegiate sailors **Will Rucker**, **Andrea Melnik**, and **Charlie Allen** are eager to show their strength among the Southeastern Lightning District this summer. With plans to compete in the North American Championship this August in Sheboygan, WI. This team will be enthusiastic to spend as much time as possible in the boat and experience the infamous Lightning Class camaraderie. The team intends to learn the boat and prepare in the Charleston, SC area and will be mentored by Ryan Davidson, Fleet 429.

*“Our team is very excited for the opportunity to sail the [Lightning] Grant Boat and become more familiar with the Lightning Class. We are looking forward to getting on the water to learn, improve, and compete.” - Will Rucker*

(L-R) Will Rucker, Charlie Allen, Andrea Melnik



Based in Boston, MA is **Mercedes Escandon** and her team consisting of **Lucas Escandon** and **Peter Tadoada**. This group of New Jersey born sailors grew up among Fleet 34 at Metedeconk River Yacht Club and its long standing history with the Lightning Class. As past participants of the U32 Invitational Championship, they are eager to build their own legacy. They will be mentored by Boston and Buffalo based sailor, Tanner Probst, Fleet 12.



*"We've all had amazing experiences with Lightnings in the past, so we're super excited for this opportunity to really dive in, level up our sailing, and have so much fun along the way!" – Mercedes Escandon*

(L-R) Mercedes Escandon, Lucas Escandon, Peter Tadoada

Surrounded by deep Lightning culture is the team based in Wrightsville, NC consisting of skipper, **Daniel Diederich** and crews **AnnaBlake Sprengelmeyer**, **Caswell Kern**, and **Noah Essick**. The team has an intense schedule of practices and local regattas leading up to the Lightning North American Championship.

*"We are excited for the Lightning [Boat] Grant this year and grateful of the committee. Let's have a good season!" – Daniel Diederich*



(L-R) Daniel Diederich, AnnaBlake Sprengelmeyer, Caswell Kern, Noah Essick

The Lightning Class is dedicated to encouraging the next generation of boat owners and sailors to get involved.

Ched Proctor, Boat Grant Co-Chair expressed his enthusiasm about this year's teams, "The large group of talented applicants made working with the boat grant committee great fun this year. To select the 4 best qualified was a challenge. I'm looking forward to working with our selected candidates."

Interested in the Boat Grant Program but don't want to wait until next year? Check out the [U32 Invitational Regatta](#) (designed for sailors 21-32), October 24-25 at the Charleston Yacht Club or check out the Lightning Class [Regatta calendar](#) to see if there are any regattas near you. The Limbaugh Fund also offers regatta entry fee subsidies to those U32. Don't miss out on the FUN!

Thank you to our generous members and supporters who make programs like this possible. We invite you to join them and [make a donation](#) to help foster the next generation of boat owners and sailors.

Contact the Class Office with any questions. [office@lightningclass.org](mailto:office@lightningclass.org) or click the link for more information on the [Boat Grant Program](#).

---