Saturday's Rescue Regatta was a joyful event

Deltaville-area race raises funds for Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad

by Larry Chowning

The boats are off and sailing at the start of the Rescue Regatta Saturday in Deltaville on the Chesapeake Bay. The funds raised are going to support the Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad. (Photo by Paul Almany)

The Chesapeake Bay can have many different faces, but on Saturday at the Rescue Regatta sailing races the bay put on a happy face.

As the boats were nearing the starting line at 11 a.m. off Stingray Point the sun beamed with sun dots jumping across the water. There was a good breeze for sailing and a pod of about 25 dolphins showed up to join in the fun.

The announcer addressed the group over the radio by saying, "The dolphins have come out to play. It is going to be a beautiful day!"

Aboard Paul Almany's Carolina skiff, this reporter watched the race from start to finish. The race started at 11 a.m. and finished for the winning boat at about 2:15 p.m. Almany is a member of Fishing Bay Yacht Club (FBYC) and went out to photograph the event.

Almany lives in Richmond and has a weekend home on Stove Point. The FBYC played a large role in bringing him and his family to Deltaville. He joined the club in 2007 to give his children an opportunity to learn to sail and be a part of a sailing family and community. It worked out great and Almany has nothing but high praise for FBYC and the role the club plays in the sailing community across the entire Chesapeake Bay.

Throughout the day, Almany explained to this old reporter from Urbanna, who grew up at the helm of a John Wright built skiff with no sails and who seldom varied from that, race events as they happened.

FBYC members volunteered to run the regatta race. The Rescue Regatta was the brainchild of Tina Mennett and others to raise funds to support the Middlesex County Volunteer Rescue Squad (MCVRS).

The squad services the entire 40-mile long county of Middlesex with three stations. There is a main station in Deltaville, and branches in Hartfield and Urbanna. The cost of doing business for MCVRS has exploded over the past few years, forcing Middlesex County's local government to provide some funding. But mostly, the squad lives off volunteers and the funds they can generate.

MCVRS was founded in 1958 and is one of the oldest volunteer rescue squads in Virginia.

The race

The pursuit style race started at 11 a.m. with the slower boats starting then and faster boats staggering their starts until the last boat "Afterthought" passed the starting line at 11:41 a.m.

The starting line was between the FBYC committee boat named "Mr. Roberts" and a buoy out in the bay. Afterthought and the skipper Craig Wright and crew went over the starting line early and had to turn around and go back and start again. After the boat came back and made a clean start, the announcer came over the radio and said, "All clean starts. Have fun racing boys and girls!"

Almany said "lookout for Afterthought; he will run the other boats down in a hurry."

The race covered about 10 nautical miles with the halfway point at about five miles. At the halfway mark five boats were in the running, all FBYC boats. It looked like the boat Madhatter was going to lead the pack at the halfway mark but Afterthought made the turn first with others sailing in its wake.

As Almany and his Carolina Skiff made its way back to the finish line, he said, "Those guys (near the front) don't quit. They race!"

As the afternoon progressed, several boats announced that they were quitting the race. There was a 3 p.m. deadline for all boats to cross the finish line.

Back at the finish line boats were waiting to see the finish. It was pretty clear that Afterthought that started last and had to go back and make the starting turn again was in the lead, with three boats in close pursuit.

As they got closer, Afterthought was distancing itself from the group and crossed the line first.

"I think all of the boats in the first group were FBYC sailors," said Almany. "We have some really experienced sailors in the club. So many of them honed their skills racing small sailboats and worked their way up to these larger boats."

As more boats crossed the finish line and others announced they were quitting, they were a reminder that it was a race to support the MCVRS and everyone who participated was a winner.

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