

lifeguard races / 20 crews set for Island Row in North Wildwood Tuesday

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Dennis Funk, 55, and George Miller, 56, won the 20-mile race last year and are back to try to defend their title.

Most of the 20 crews that will race in Tuesday's 32nd annual North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row are veterans of the event, and many are former champions.

The 20-mile race around Wildwood island will start at 7:15 a.m. at Surf Avenue and 1st Avenue in the Hereford inlet in North Wildwood and go counterclockwise.

The Around The Island Row goes under the Stone Harbor Bridge, and through the back bay and Cold Spring Inlet at the bottom of Wildwood. After a final turn into the ocean, the race finishes at the 15th Avenue beach in North Wildwood.

For the third year in a row, race director Charlie Iepson and the other officials will start the race at Surf Avenue and 1st Avenue (instead of 15th Avenue beach) in order to avoid the sandbars and rough surf in Hereford Inlet. That takes about a mile off the originally 21-mile race.

"These guys train all year (for the race), and it would be a shame if their boat filled with water from the sandbars in the inlet or if their boat flipped and they were out of the race," Iepson said. "It's basically a safety issue.

"We have some really good crews, so it should be great race."

The Ventnor alumni team of Dennis Funk and George Miller is back. Funk, 55, and Miller, 56, won last year in 2 hours, 40 minutes, 21 seconds. They have won the race four times.

One of their biggest challenges should come from the Ventnor crew of Andrew Funk and David Funk, Dennis Funk's twin sons. Andrew is now an alumnus, while David is the two-time South Jersey singles row champion. They won the Around The Island Row in 2003.

Wildwood Crest's Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy, six-time winners of the race, and fourth in 2006, also return. Another contender is Margate's Carl Smallwood Jr. and Rich Kugel, who won in 2002 and placed fifth last year.

Wildwood's Ed Schneider and Ryan Meyer, who finished second in 2006, will go Tuesday, along with Kevin Murphy and Jim Wadlow (Cape May), the alumni crew of Jim Swift (Margate) and Scott Jones (Ventnor), and Colin Corcoran and Sean Riley (Sea Isle City).

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lifeguard competition / Cape May's Murphy and Wadlow win 20-mile North Wildwood ROW

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Cape May's Kevin Murphy and Jim Wadlow, a dominant doubles crew in the mid-1990s, finally win the row around Wildwood island.

Kevin Murphy is an Atlantic City fireman and a Margate resident, but people associate him with the Cape May Beach Patrol because he and partner Jim Wadlow were the area's top doubles crew for Cape May in the mid-1990s.

Murphy retired from the beach patrol in 2000 after 18 years but wanted to come back as a lifeguard this summer for a final season and row with Wadlow again.

Trying to recapture past glory usually has a harsh reality for older athletes on the comeback trail, and Murphy and Wadlow couldn't win a single race against other patrols this summer.

But that changed Tuesday.

Murphy and Wadlow, rowing in the same red boat that was their trademark years ago, won the North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row with a powerful sprint in the ocean that left the field behind

The Cape May crew won the 20-mile row around Wildwood island in 2 hours, 57 minutes, 51 seconds. Defending champions Dennis Funk and George Miller, the Ventnor alumni crew, were 200 yards behind in second place in 3:00.21. Carl Smallwood Jr. and Rich Kugel, a Margate alumnus and the Margate chief, respectively, were third in 3:02.11, 150 yards behind Funk and Miller.

"I told Jim last summer that I wanted to come back this year and row one more summer, and he said that the crews are a lot faster now," said Murphy, who will be 40 in September. "He said I better train pretty hard over the winter."

The Around The Island Row is the only big doubles race that Murphy and Wadlow didn't win in the 1990s. They won the South Jersey Lifeguard Championship (1995, 1996), the Margate Memorials (1995, 2000), the Dutch Hoffman Memorials (1996), the Cape May County Championship (1995-97, 2000) and the Upper Township Six-Mile Bay Row (1995, 1997 and 2000).

"It feels really special to win the race," said Murphy, the bow. "We didn't do too well in the lifeguard races this year, but we trained really hard and were in condition. I think I'll come back next summer."

Unlike Murphy, Wadlow, a 22-year guard, had a previous win in the Around The Island Row, with partner Steve Mogck in 1994.

"I was shocked to win it years ago early in my career, and then you think that maybe you can win it a few more times," Wadlow, 41, said. "I've come to really appreciate it over the years because it's a very difficult race. It's great to win it again."

"We've been rowing well all year but haven't won the shorter races. We stayed with the pack early in the race. Max (Bilkins) and Bick (Murphy of Wildwood Crest) came up on us after the Cape May Bridge (at about mile-12), and Funk and Miller and Margate were ahead of us. I thought we were racing for third, but we kept on making strokes and pushing ahead."

Twin-brothers Andrew and David Funk of Ventnor, Dennis Funk's sons, rowed to the lead almost immediately after the start and held it until Funk and Miller took over first before the Cape May

Bridge. Kugel and Smallwood led briefly after the Cold Spring Inlet at the bottom of Wildwood.

Andrew Funk became an lifeguard alumnus after he and David won the Around The Island Row in 2003.

"I've rowed about a dozen times this summer by myself," Andrew Funk said. "This is the first time Dave and I got in the boat since we won this race. There was a little problem with timing. It's easy in the bay, but in the ocean we weren't hitting very well together."

¶ NOTE -- The race's oldest competitor was Cape May's 67-year-old Herb Treffeisen, who was 17th with partner Steve Kowalik. Treffeisen, a longtime oarsman who was in his first Around The Island Row, has been a lifeguard nearly every year since 1959.

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1. Cape May (Kevin Murphy-Jim Wadlow) 2:57.51;
2. Ventnor alumni (Dennis Funk-George Miller) 3:00.21;
3. Margate (Carl Smallwood Jr.-Rich Kugel) 3:02.11;
4. Wildwood Crest (Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy) 3:03.48;
5. Wildwood (Ed Schneider-Ryan Meyer) 3:04.59;
6. Ventnor (Andrew Funk-David Funk) 3:07.12;
7. Wildwood (Bill Kindle-Nate Dirvin) 3:07.42;
8. Ventnor-Margate alumni (Scott Jones-Jim Swift) 3:09.47;
9. Wildwood Crest (John Way-Steve Zamulinsky) 3:11.24;
10. Sea Isle City (Colin Corcoran-Sean Riley) 3:12.59;
11. Margate alumni (B.J. Fox-John Swift) 3:14.34;
12. Wildwood (John Lose-Steve McGuinn) 3:15.56;
13. Longport (Pat Armstrong-Tom Sher) 3:19.00;
14. Cape May (Terry Randolph-Geoff Rife) 3:19.37;
15. Wildwood Crest (Rich Angelucci-Joe Maloy III) 3:19.50;
16. Longport (Brian Duffey-Don MacEachern) 3:20.10;
17. Cape May (Steve Kowalik-Herb Treffeisen) 3:20.21;
18. Wildwood (Jay Arcinese-Shane Regan) 3:24.08;
19. Stone Harbor (Zac Campbell-Dennis Bakey) 3:47.22;
20. Stone Harbor (Steve New-Keith Gabor) 3:51.23.

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