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AT 48, WILDWOOD CREST LIFEGUARD MAX BILKINS ROWS, ROWS, ROWS HIS BOAT

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Wildwood Crest Beach Patrol Senior Lieutenant Max Bilkins is a 48-year-old oarsman who competes in lifeguard races against young men less than half his age. Bilkins, whose first name is pronounced "Mox," due to his German heritage, has been a winning rower for the Crest since the early 1970s. Bilkins has been a Crest guard since 1970. Lifeguard racing fans remember him most for his prowess in the North Wildwood Around The Island Row, a 21-mile rowing race around Wildwood island that he has won seven times in 25 years. Five of those victories have been with partner Bick Murphy, who's a relative youngster at 42.

"I was in the first Around The Island Row in 1976, and there were about eight to 10 boats," Bilkins said. "Harry Zander and Bud Tarbotton Sr. did well competing in the Atlantic City island row, and they helped to organize the row around Wildwood. Zander won the first race around Wildwood (with partner Jim Troy). Each year the race got bigger and bigger, and Atlantic City

also dropped their race."

Bilkins teamed with John Greenwood for his first Around The Island Row victory in 1978, and won again in 1979 with Dave Koper. Bilkins won the marathon row with Murphy in 1985, 1992, 1993, 1995 and 1996. During the 1990s, Bilkins and Murphy have usually been the Wildwood Crest crew in the other big lifeguard events, and as recently as 1999 the pair won Cape May County Championships and the David J. Kerr Memorials.

Friday, they won the doubles row in the Beschen-Callahan Memorials.

"Bick and I plan on rowing as long as we can keep on going," Bilkins said. "We'll keep on going as long as it's fun, and it is fun."

Bilkins won a singles title at the South Jersey Lifeguard Championship at Brigantine in 1980, and took second in the doubles (with Murphy) and singles in 1985 as Wildwood Crest won its first South Jersey Championship team title.

"I remember in 1980 I took a wave at Margate (the Margate Memorials) the week before (the South Jerseys) and the boat got filled with water," Bilkins said. "I never even got off the beach. Then I went to Brigantine (for the South Jersey singles row) and ended up winning. That was quite a turnaround."

Bilkins played football and baseball at Central High School in Philadelphia and got his bachelors and masters degrees at Temple University. Now a Bucks County resident, he teaches at Washington High School in Philadelphia and just finished his 27th year in the Philadelphia school system. Bilkins and wife Sandra have three children, Nicole, Tara and Brianna.

Bilkins had never rowed before 1970 when he joined the Crest patrol at 17, but then-Captain Joe Freeman encouraged him to do it. His name is now synonymous with lifeguard rowing in this area, but sports fans sometimes forget that lifeguarding is actually a job.

"The beach scene has changed, and lifeguarding has changed a lot over the years," Bilkins said. "CPR and first aid certifications are needed, the training is rigorous, and so much precaution is taken for safety. There are 14 women on our patrol now, and that's a positive thing. They're good athletes, intelligent and good lifeguards. There are a lot more vehicles. Over a two-mile stretch of

beach, we can get to anyone for a rescue within 30 seconds.

"Lifeguarding has gotten away from the old glamour-boy stereotype, where the guard is sitting there on the stand talking to girls. That might still be true to some degree, but our guards are very well trained."

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LIFEGUARDS / ROWERS TO HIT WILDWOOD ISLAND MONDAY MORNING

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Author: GUY GARGAN For The Press, (609) 272-7210

The 26th annual North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row will begin at 7 a.m. Monday at 15th Avenue beach in North Wildwood. The event is a 21-mile counterclockwise row around Wildwood Island for two-man boats.

The Around The Island Row has been dominated over the years by veteran lifeguard oarsmen and by alumni rowers who have competed in the race several times before. There was a surprise last year when 21-year-old Rob Lythgoe and 22-year-old Tom Lake gave the Stone Harbor Beach Patrol its first-ever victory in the race. Their time was 2 hours, 59.58 seconds. Lythgoe, the bow man, had never been in the event before.

The boats will get a floating start at 15th Avenue and head north to the Hereford Inlet. The crews row through the inlet under the Stone Harbor Bridge and the Grassy Sound Bridge. The boats then head south in the backbay to the West Wildwood train trestle and the Rio Grande Bridge, and continue down to the Cape May Bridge.

The crews reach the Cold Spring Inlet at the bottom of Wildwood, and then make the turn into the ocean. The final seven-mile sprint in the ocean will take the boats north back to the 15th Avenue finish line.

Several of Monday's entries have a chance to win. Lythgoe didn't return to the Stone Harbor patrol this summer, and Lake will row with Darrick Kobierowski. The two were second at the Beschen-Callahan's and third in the Upper Township Six-Mile Bay Row. Twin brothers Andrew and David Funk of Ventnor placed second at the Dutch Hoffman's and tied for second at the South Jersey Championships. They also won the David Kerr Memorials.

Margate's Carl Smallwood Jr. and Rich Kugel tied for second place in the island row last year with Wildwood's Steve Stocks and Tom Kilian, the first tie in the race's history. The two boats, which are both entered again, finished in 3:00.38. The Ventnor alumni crew of Dennis Funk and George Miller set the meet record of 2:55.30 in 1999, and they were fourth last year.

Avalon's Craig Whitehead and John Wachter won the Six-Mile Bay Row, and North Wildwood's Tom Ogden and Romolo Forcino were second in that race. Wildwood Crest veterans Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy, five-time winners of the Around The Island Row, won the Beschen-Callahan's this summer. Longport's Nick Grasso and Eric Funk won the Chief Bill Kuhn Brigantine Bay Races doubles this year, and tied for second with the Funks at the South Jersey's. John Ammerman and Mike Alton will row for Atlantic City.

LINEUPS

ATLANTIC CITY - John Ammerman-Mike Alton; VENTNOR - Mike Skey-Tom Sher; Andrew Funk-David Funk; Dennis Funk-George Miller (alumni); MARGATE - Carl Smallwood Jr.-Rich Kugel; John Swift-Chris Graves; Jim Swift-Joe Swift; LONGPORT - Nick Grasso-Eric Funk, Jim Grimley-Tom Grimley;

B.J. Fox-Brian Fox; UPPER TOWNSHIP - Joe Larosa III-Jim O'Connor; AVALON - Craig Whitehead-John Wachter; Anselm Sauter-Ryan Broderick; Brian O'Shea-John Kelley (alumni); STONE HARBOR - Darrick Kobierowski-Tom Lake; NORTH WILDWOOD - Tom Ogden-Romolo Forcino; Dennis Smith-Steve DelMonte; Bill Kindle-Lou Dwyer; WILDWOOD - Steve Stocks-Tom Kilian; Ed Schneider-Dave Reidy; Steve McGuinn-Mike Regan; WILDWOOD CREST - Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy; Tom Pietzak-Mike D'Amico; Terry McGovern-Jack Moore; CAPE MAY - Eric Mogck-Jim Wadlow; BARNEGAT LIGHT - Andrew Mescolotto-T.J. Petronzio.

THE FOLLOWING TEXT WAS NOT PUBLISHED:

CHAMPIONS

- 2000 - Rob Lythgoe-Tom Lake, Stone Harbor, 2:59:58
- 1999 - Dennis Funk-George Miller, Ventnor alumni, 2:55:30
- 1998 - Ted Frankel-Mike Alton, Atlantic City, 2:59:54
- 1997 - Craig Whitehead-Mark Wachlin, Avalon, 3:16:07
- 1996 - Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy, Wildwood Crest, 3:04:28
- 1995 - Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy, Wildwood Crest, 2:57:48
- 1994 - Steve Mogck-Jim Wadlow, Cape May, 2:59:50
- 1993 - Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy, Wildwood Crest, 3:04:50
- 1992 - Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy, Wildwood Crest, 3:10:15
- 1991 - Bob McGinty-Cliff Murray, Ventnor alumni, 3:03:49
- 1990 - Ted Evans-Chuck Dunn, Ocean City, 3:03:50
- 1989 - John Kelley-Stuart Grant, Margate, 3:00:08
- 1988 - Ron Kirk-Chuck Dunn, Ocean City, 2:59:34
- 1987 - Dennis Funk-George Miller, Ventnor alumni, 2:56:06
- 1986 - Bill Sieck-Dan O'Malley, Avalon (race course shortened)
- 1985 - Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy, Wildwood Crest, 3:07:08

- 1984 - Tom Morrison-John Millar, Ocean City (no times kept)
- 1983 - Ron Kirk-John Herron, Ocean City, 2:57:05
- 1982 - Rick Shoyer-Tom Morrison, Ocean City
- 1981 - Dan O'Malley-Pete Soderman, Avalon
- 1980 - Dan O'Malley-Dave Kerr, Avalon
- 1979 - Max Bilkins-Dave Koper, Wildwood Crest
- 1978 - Max Bilkins-John Greenwood, Wildwood Crest
- 1977 - Jim Troy-Harry Zander, North Wildwood
- 1976 - Jim Troy-Harry Zander, North Wildwood, 2:59:17.

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LIFEGUARDS / STONE HARBOR DUO WINS 21- MILE ROW

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With the final seven-mile sprint in the ocean still awaiting them, at least six contending crews had a chance to win the 26th annual North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around the Island Row on Monday morning. That's when Stone Harbor's Darrick Kobierowski and Tom Lake made their move and won the 21-mile race.

Lake won the row around Wildwood last year in Stone Harbor's first victory in the event, but he was overshadowed by doubles partner Rob Lythgoe, a two-time winner of the Cape May Beach Patrol Superathlon and perhaps the South Jersey Chiefs Association's top all-around athlete in 2000.

Lythgoe didn't return to the Stone Harbor patrol this summer.

As a multiple winner of the island row, the 23-year-old Lake, a seven-year guard and 2001 Temple University graduate, now will get more attention because he joins an exclusive list.

Others who have won the Around The Island Row at least twice are North Wildwood's Jim Troy and Harry Zander (who teamed to win the first two races in 1976 and 1977).

They're still the home patrol's only winning crew), Max Bilkins of Wildwood Crest (the event's only seven-time winner), Bick Murphy (Bilkins' partner in five wins), Avalon's Dan O'Malley (three wins), Ocean City's Ron Kirk, Tom Morrison, and Chuck Dunn (two wins apiece), and the Ventnor alumni crew of Dennis Funk and George Miller (two wins).

Kobierowski and Lake won in a relatively slow time of 3 hours, 2 minutes, 45 seconds, and Atlantic City's Mike Alton and John Ammerman were second in 3:03:30. Carl Smallwood Jr. and chief Rich Kugel of Margate placed third in 3:03:42, and Cape's May's Eric Mogck and Jim Wadlow were fourth with a time of 3:03.53.

"The first one (the 2000 victory) was awesome and unexpected," said Lake, the stern man both years and a former member of the Temple lightweight eight. "We were hoping to be in it this year, and we pulled it out. It's awesome to row against these guys."

"We thought we had a great shot. We were third in the (Upper Township Six-Mile) Bay Race (on August 1). We're a bigger crew than last year because I weigh more, and Darrick is bigger than Rob. So we rowed lower (with a lower stroke rate) with more power behind it."

Kobierowski is a 27-year-old, fourth-year guard and an assistant crew coach at North Catholic High School in Philadelphia. He rowed singles for Stone Harbor in 2000, and both singles and doubles at each beach event Stone Harbor went to this summer.

"We knew we were definitely in shape to do it, if we could stand the conditions (like rough surf and the current going against the boats in the back bay)," Kobierowski said. "Our game plan was to stay with the pack. At the rock pile (the Cold Spring Inlet at the bottom of Wildwood) the game started.

"Our plan was to give it everything we've got at that point. There's one hour left in the race, so you turn it on, because we knew we were in shape."

The boats got a floating start at 15th Avenue beach in North Wildwood and headed north to the Hereford Inlet, where big waves were waiting. Romolo Forcino and Tom Ogden of North Wildwood led Kobierowski and Lake by three boatlengths at the inlet, with Mogck and Wadlow two boatlengths behind Stone Harbor. Alton and Ammerman trailed Cape May by four lengths. Two Avalon boats (that of Craig Whitehead and John Wachter, and that of alumni Brian O'Shea

and John Kelley) took on big waves in the inlet and filled with water. The two boats did not continue.

Ogden and Forcino held the lead through the Stone Harbor Bridge checkpoint, but Wadlow and Mogck took over first place before the Rio Grande Bridge. Alton and Ammerman led at the Cape May Bridge, with the Stone Harbor crew two boatlengths behind.

RESULTS

1. Stone Harbor (Darrick Kobierowski-Tom Lake) 3:02:45; 2. Atlantic City (Mike Alton-John Ammerman) 3:03:30; 3. Margate (Carl Smallwood Jr.-Rich Kugel) 3:03:42; 4. Cape May (Eric Mogck-Jim Wadlow) 3:03:53; 5. North Wildwood (Tom Ogden-Romolo Forcino) 3:04:58; 6. Ventnor alumni (Dennis Funk-George Miller) 3:05:36; 7. Atlantic City (B.J.Fox-Brian Fox) 3:10:20; 8. Wildwood (Steve McGuinn-Mike Regan) 3:13:30; 9. Wildwood Crest (Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy) 3:13:44; 10. Longport (Nick Grasso-Eric Funk) 3:16:23; 11. Margate (John Swift-Chris Graves) 3:20:34; 12. Ventnor (Mike Skey-Tom Sher) 3:21:13; 13. North Wildwood (Dennis Smith-Steve Del Monte) 3:24:12; 14. Margate alumni (Jim Swift-Joe Swift) 3:25:12; 15. Wildwood (Steve Stocks-Tom Kilian) 3:26:50; 16. Wildwood Crest (Terry McGovern-Jack Moore) 3:29:36; 17. Wildwood (Ed Schneider-Dave Reidy) 3:30:02; 18. Wildwood Crest (Mike D'Amico-Tom Pietrzak) 3:30:32; 19. North Wildwood (Bill Kindle-Lou Dwyer) 3:32:30; 20. Upper Township (Joe Larosa III-Jim O'Connor) 3:35:04; 21. Longport (Jim Grimley-Tom Grimley) 3:38:13; 22. Barnegat Light (T.J. Petronzio-Andrew Mescolotto) 3:53.11; Avalon (Craig Whitehead-John Wachter) DNF; Avalon alumni (Brian O'Shea-John Kelley) DNF.

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