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Rowing / 35th Island Row starts early Monday in North Wildwood

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Lifeguards and alumni rowers meet early Monday morning in the Bud Tarbotton Memorial North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row, the area's longest and toughest race for doubles crews.

What: The 35th annual Bud Tarbotton Memorial North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row, a 20-mile, counterclockwise row around Wildwood island.

Where: The race starts at 1st and Surf avenues in North Wildwood. The crews go through the Hereford Inlet, turn into the back bay down to Cold Spring Inlet and head back in the ocean to the finish line at the 15th Avenue beach in North Wildwood. The race for years was a complete circuit of the island, but a mile of the course was taken off starting in 2005 due to the sandbars and rough surf in the Hereford Inlet.

When: 6:30 a.m. Monday. The race has an early start in order to get a favorable tide for the rowers.

Who: Current area lifeguard crews and lifeguard alumni, most of whom have rowed the race many times.

Defending champion: The alumni team of Carl Smallwood Jr. (Margate) and B.J. Fox (Atlantic

City and Longport) has won the race the last two years. They won the 2009 race in 2 hours, 40 minutes, 34 seconds.

What's unique: In addition to being the only morning lifeguard event of the season, the Around The Island Row is the only race in which the spectators travel in vehicles to various parts of the island to watch the progress of the event. The race honors the late Tarbotton, who founded it in 1976 as a member of the North Wildwood City Council.

Lifeguards to watch: Smallwood and Fox are back, and they'll be challenged by several outstanding crews, such as Ventnor alumni Dennis Funk and George Miller, 58 and 59, respectively. Funk and Miller, four-time winners of the race, have finished second the last three years. Third in 2009 and back are Margate's Chris Graves and Greg Smallwood (Carl's brother). Ed Schneider and Brandon Joyce were fifth a year ago, and they're also set to go. Two other likely contending crews are Wildwood Crest's Terry McGovern and Matt Benedetto (sixth in 2009) and Wildwood's Tom McLaughlin and Steve McGuinn (seventh a year ago). Max Bilkins, 58, of Wildwood Crest, will row today with John Maloy, who won the South Jersey Lifeguard swimming title from 2007-2009. Bilkins has a record eight wins around the island. Six of those victories were with regular partner Bick Murphy, who had to return to Emory University in Atlanta, where he's a professor in the aquatics department. Don't count out Avalon's Craig Whitehead and Shane McGrath, the two-time winners of the Upper Township M.S. Six-Mile Bay Row.

Cape May veteran Geoff Rife will team with Cape May alumnus Jim Wadlow, and Upper Township's Wayne MacMurray will row with Bill Kindle, a Wildwood alumnus. Brothers Jim Swift and John Swift are Margate alumni. Also ready are Cape May's Erika Axelsson and Mary Grace Maggiano, the only all-female crew.

Contact Guy Gargan: 609-272-7210 ggargan@pressofac.com

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Lifeguard races / Margate duo wins 20-mile Wildwood row

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The Margate Beach Patrol crew of Lt. Chris Graves and Capt. Greg Smallwood emerged from the shadows Monday morning to win the 35th annual Bud Tarbotton Memorial North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row.

The most obvious shadow was a literal one because Graves and Smallwood trailed two-time defending champions Carl Smallwood Jr. (Greg's brother) and B.J. Fox most of the way around Wildwood island.

The figurative shadow was the fact that Graves and Smallwood, one of southern New Jersey's top beach crews, lost the Margate patrol race earlier this summer to the powerful team of Ashton Funk and Chuck Gowdy. Not winning the patrol race meant that Graves and Smallwood couldn't be in any big beach races this summer.

Graves and Greg Smallwood, in a blue Margate boat, took the lead in the Cold Spring Inlet at the bottom of Wildwood and held off Carl Smallwood Jr. and Fox by less than three boatlengths to win the 20-mile row in 2 hours, 44 minutes, 15 seconds. Carl Smallwood and Fox finished in 2:44:23. More than a minute went by before Stone Harbor's Darrick Kobierowski and Dennis Bakey crossed the line third in 2:45:41.

It was the first win in the event for both Graves and Greg Smallwood.

"It's great to win it," Graves, 28, said. "We had a two-year drought (without winning a race). This is my fourth time in this race, and third with Greg. People have won this race like (Dennis) Funk and (George) Miller, and Carl and B.J., and it's nice to be mentioned with them.

"It helped that the race was later (in the season than usual). We were able to get into the boat for long (workout) pieces."

Carl Smallwood and Fox, a lifeguard alumni crew, were in first place through the back bays but ran aground for about 30 seconds in the Cold Spring Inlet (which is known by the rowers as "the rockpile"). Smallwood and Fox, in a white Margate boat, came to a halt when they got stuck on some rocks that were hidden under the water. They both had to get in the stern end of the boat to get it unstuck.

"I misjudged it and got us too close to the rocks," Carl Smallwood said. "We had a great row apart from the mistake. We just ran out of real estate (at the end). We were about 40 to 50 yards behind after we got going again."

Fox added, "Greg and Chris are tough and you can't give them that kind of lead. It was a little frustrating. It makes you enjoy your wins a lot more."

Graves and Greg Smallwood were third around the island last year. In their only other race against other patrols this year, they were sixth in the Upper Township M.S. Six-Mile Bay Row.

"This is a good way to end the season," said Smallwood, 34, who was in his sixth race around the island. "We trained for the (Margate) city race, but we lost to Ashton and Chuck. Then we started going for the six-mile race and then for this. Today we had a great start, unlike last year when we had a terrible start. We were able to do what we wanted to do. Carl and B.J. rowed a good race, but we capitalized on their error. The whole race we were sitting off their stern, and we knew it would come down to the ocean. Once we got the lead, we were pretty confident that we could hold on."

Twenty-six doubles crews started the row at 1st Avenue and Surf Avenue in North Wildwood at 6:30 a.m. The boats went counterclockwise around the island to the finish in the ocean at 15th Avenue beach. All the boats finished. Funk and Miller, four-time winners of the race, placed fourth in 2:46:38, and Avalon's Craig Whitehead and Shane McGrath were fifth in 2:47:48.

Wildwood Crest's Max Bilkins, an eight-time winner of the race, rowed with John Maloy, who was in his first race around the island. They placed 14th. "It was fun, but it was hard," Maloy said. "Max told me what to do every step of the way. I'll definitely try to do it again."

Cape May's Erika Axelsson and Mary Grace Maggiano, the only female crew, finished 25th in 3:12:45.

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RESULTS

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Author: GUY GARGAN For The Press

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Caption: View photos in e-Press.

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Correction: The following correction was published on Wednesday, August 25, 2010, on page A2 of the General section in all editions: Margate's Greg Smallwood and Chris Graves were incorrectly identified in a photo caption on Page D1 Tuesday about the Bud Tarbotton Memorial North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row. Smallwood was on the right, Graves on the left.

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