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NORTH WILDWOOD - Darrick Kobierowski and Terry McGovern, both 46 years old, are still going strong.

The two Wildwood Crest lifeguards scored a wire-to-wire victory in the 45th annual Bud Tarbotton North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row on Tuesday.

Kobierowski and McGovern led by more than 200 yards at the end at the 15th Avenue beach, finishing in 2 hours, 36 minutes, 55 seconds.

The two have won the 20-mile race around Wildwood together five times (also 2014-16 and 2018).

Longport's Mike McGrath and Sean Duffey were second in 2:39.04 in their third race around the island and first since 2017. The lifeguard alumni crew of Carl Smallwood Jr. (Margate) and B.J. Fox (Longport) finished third in 2:39.45, about 40 yards behind McGrath and Duffey.

"It always feels good to win it, like the first time," said Kobierowski, the bow. "We started rowing later this year, but then we hit the ground running. We hit all the bench marks that we wanted to hit. The Crest had four boats today, and we all pushed each other. That's a good recipe for success. A couple days ago, it was windy, and we train for that, but it turned out to be a beautiful day today."

McGovern didn't want to discuss it in detail but had COVID-19 virus in March and spent 12 days in the hospital.

"After I got out, I talked to Darrick, and he said, 'I got to get the oars back in your hands,' " McGovern said. "It feels great to win. We wanted to row our race, and it worked out."

McGovern's experience with COVID-19 this year brought out some inspiration.

"I want to dedicate the race to the police, the firefighters, the doctors and nurses, lifeguards and essential workers," McGovern said. "As lifeguards, we're trying to bring a little normalcy into people's lives here at the beach. I also want to dedicate it to a friend of mine, Marty Derer, a South Jersey high school basketball referee who died of COVID in March, and to Mark Gose, a North Wildwood Beach Patrol medic and retired Wildwood firefighter who died this year."

McGovern, the stern, also won the race in 2011-12 with Crest's Brendan Cunningham. Seven wins is one off the record of eight held by Max Bilkins, also of Wildwood Crest. Bilkins and Bick Murphy won the Around The Island Row a record six times. Bilkins and Murphy are both still on the patrol.

"We never discuss it when we're with them, but Max and Bick set the bar really high, both athletically and professionally," McGovern said. "Darrick and I just do the best we can and don't worry about that."

Second in the race was the best finish yet for McGrath and Duffey.

"You get better each time in this race," said Duffey, 37, the stern. "You learn to hydrate and stuff like that. It felt pretty good. We ended up on the rockpile (at the Cold Spring inlet at the bottom of Wildwood), but when we hit the ocean (the final 7 miles), we did well."

Smallwood and Fox improved on last year's fourth-place finish. Ventnor's Brett Hanson, who won last year with Doug Davis, finished fourth Tuesday with Atlantic City's Kyle Deroo in 2:40.25.

The race was one of the few lifeguard races of the year. A bigger crowd than usual came out to see the row.

"The race went well," said Bill Ciavarelli, a North Wildwood Beach Patrol Captain and the race director. "We took all the precautions, and the people came out to see it, the rowing community. We had a lot of former winners rowing and several novice rowers."

Former Sea Isle City lifeguard Kevin Larkin, 70, finished 11th out of 22 crews with Jim Gibbons, 57, an Upper Township alumnus. Larkin and Gibbons are regulars in the race.

"This is it, my last race," Larkin said. "I promised my wife, Lori. I can't do this anymore, but I'll still do some recreational rowing."

Jim Swift, 58, a Margate Beach Patrol alumnus, finished 13th with son Jim Swift IV, 18, a Margate guard.

Twins Amanda and Kristine Auble, of Margate, finished 18th in 3:04.55 in their first race over 6 miles. They were the only women in the race.

"We had to pace ourselves and take it (the stroke rate) lower," said Amanda Auble, 25. "We were watching the other boats. This was the only race of the year, so we had to do it."

Results

1. Wildwood Crest (Darrick Kobierowski-Terry McGovern) 2:36.55
2. Longport (Mike McGrath-Sean Duffey) 2:39.04
3. Margate alumnus-Longport alumnus (Carl Smallwood Jr.-B.J. Fox) 2:39.45
4. Ventnor-Atlantic City (Brett Hanson-Kyle Deroo) 2:40.25
5. Ventnor alumni (Tom Sher-Kevin Prendergast) 2:42.55

6. Wildwood Crest (Pat Bakey-Jake Klecko) 2:43.00
7. Wildwood (Steve McGuinn-Patrick Clemons) 2:44.15
8. Wildwood (Brandon Joyce-Joe Comas) 2:45.00
9. Wildwood (John Preston-Tom Kilian) 2:45.29
10. Wildwood Crest (Ron Ayres-John Steiger) 2:48.04
11. Sea Isle City alumnus-Upper Township alumnus (Kevin Larkin-Jim Gibbons) 2:49.20
12. North Wildwood (Pete Lees-Shaun Stamm) 2:50.30
13. Margate alumnus-Margate (Jim Swift-Jim Swift IV) 2:52.12
14. Wildwood Crest (Evan McClain-Mark Modzelewski) 2:52.40
15. Wildwood (Ed Schneider-Ben Melle) 2:53.37.

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