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FEATURED

N. WILDWOOD AROUND THE ISLAND ROW

## McGrath, Duffey dedicate Around The Island Row to teen lifeguard who died

Guy Gargan  
Aug 24, 2021



The work is over for the Longport Beach Patrol's Sean Duffey and Mike McGrath as they come ashore in victory at the North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row on Tuesday. It was their first victory four attempts at the race.

Kristian Gonyea photos, For The Press

Guy Gargan.

**N**ORTH WILDWOOD — The Longport Beach Patrol crew of Mike McGrath

and Sean Duffey — and the close bonds of the lifeguarding community — were the winners Tuesday.

McGrath and Duffey won the 46th annual North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row, their first win in four attempts in the race. Their time of 2 hours, 54 minutes, 53 seconds was more than three minutes ahead of the next fastest among the other 17 crews.

McGrath and Duffey dedicated the race to Norman Inferrera, the 16-year-old Cape May lifeguard who died Friday from injuries suffered in an on-duty accident in a surf boat Thursday.

McGrath and Duffey, two of the stars of Longport's five-time South Jersey Lifeguard Championships team, requested to row Tuesday's 18-mile race in a Cape May patrol boat in honor of Inferrera. But the only Cape May boat available was needed for Cape May guards John Knies and Rob Moran.

"We mentioned his name a few times and dedicated the race to him," Duffey, 38, said. "From what I understand, he was a kid who really loved going out and rowing."

North Wildwood Beach Patrol captain and race director Bill Ciavarelli had a moment of silence for Inferrera at Tuesday's pre-race meeting. Before the awards ceremony, Ciavarelli asked those attending to keep Inferrera, his family and the Cape May Beach Patrol in their thoughts and prayers.

Knies and Moran finished fifth, and they thanked the other patrols for helping Cape May's patrol during a difficult time.

"Other patrols have been coming to Cape May every day to help guard our beaches because we're dealing with so many other things," said Moran, 33. "Mike (McGrath) said they dedicated the Hammer Row (to be held Thursday at Seaview Harbor beach in Egg Harbor Township) to Norman. The community has really come together. It means a lot to us at Cape May."

The win by McGrath and Duffey also had special meaning to the Longport patrol because McGrath's late father, also named Mike, was in the Around the Island Row several times in the 1980s and 1990s. The elder McGrath never won the race but finished second with Don MacEachern in 1984, 1985 and 1987.

"We (McGrath and Duffey) talked about it in the ocean (during the race's final 7 miles), that this one is for Norman and my dad," said McGrath, 35. "It was exhausting. We just got into some good water a couple times and had a pretty good stroke and stayed with it. In the ocean, we did what was working."

McGrath said that all proceeds from this week's Hammer Row in EHT will go to the Inferrera family.

Duffey and McGrath are the first active Longport crew to win the race. They were second last year.

McGrath and Duffey were battling with defending champions Darrick Kobierowski and Terry McGovern of Wildwood Crest and with Crest's Ron Ayres and John Steiger at the Cape May Bridge, near the bottom of Wildwood island. The Longport crew got the lead at Cold Spring Inlet (typically called the rockpile) after the bridge and kept building on it in the final ocean run. The race ended at the 15th Avenue beach in North Wildwood.

Kobierowski and McGovern, winners in 2014-16, 2018 and 2020, finished second in 2:58.30.

"Mike and Sean are great rowers, and they earned it," said McGovern, 47.

Ayres and Steiger placed third, their best finish ever, in 2:59.29.

"I'm ecstatic," said Ayres, 53. "It's the 10th time I've done this row, and it's by far my best finish. I got seventh once. It was emotional. It was great seeing Cape May here."

The alumni crew of Carl Smallwood Jr. and B.J. Fox, winners in 2008-09, were

fourth in 3:01.10. Knies and Moran finished in 3:05.10.

“It feels great to win,” Duffey said. “It’s cool to get on the list of winners with people like Dennis Funk and George Miller (Ventnor alumni and four-time winners), Kobierowski and McGovern, and Fox and Smallwood. This is a big one for Mike because his dad was in it a lot.”

The race’s only six-time winner is the Wildwood Crest crew of Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy (1985, 1992-93, 1995-96 and 2005). Bilkins and Murphy made a comeback Tuesday but didn’t finish the race. They weren’t injured. Bilkins, 69, who was in the first Around The Island Row in 1976, has now been in the race in six decades.

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### Top finishers

1. Longport (Mike McGrath-Sean Duffey) 2:54.53
2. Wildwood Crest (Darrick Kobierowski-Terry McGovern) 2:58.30
3. Wildwood Crest (Ron Ayres-John Steiger) 2:59.29
4. Margate alumnus-Longport alumnus (Carl Smallwood Jr.-B.J. Fox) 3:01.10
5. Cape May (John Knies-Rob Moran) 3:05.10
6. Ventnor (Brett Hanson-Doug Davis) 3:07.25
7. Ventnor alumni (Tom Sher-Kevin Prendergast) 3:08.58
8. Upper Township-Upper Township alumnus (Wayne MacMurray-Jim Gibbons) 3:10.18
9. Wildwood (John Preston-Tom Kilian) 3:11.30
10. Wildwood Crest (Pat Bakey-Jake Klecko) 3:12.44.

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