

The Ms. Race – Crows Nest Article 2010

By Diane Kropfl

“Women Racing for Women”. A simple slogan, maybe, but one that accurately reflects what the Ms. Race is all about. The Ms. Race is a regatta, with boats sailed by all female crews, to benefit the charity 180 Turning Lives Around. We’d like to get women interested in racing and we want to help women build their confidence on the water. Moreover, we need to support women who have the strength and courage to rebuild their lives through programs like 180. It was Aleen Colitz’s idea to take the Ms. Race to its next level. “Going forward this is to be more than just a race”, says Ms. Colitz who co-chairs this year’s Ms. Race committee with me. “This is going to be an Event”.

Let’s go back to the origins of the Ms. Race for a moment. The Ms. Race series was founded in the 1980s and the competition continued for several years. “In 2005, Art Olsen served as Race Committee Chair and it was his idea to revive the Ms. Race”, reminisces LuAnn Rathemacher. LuAnn was Commodore at the time and provided her support. “The enthusiasm for this event has been pretty remarkable”. Many of the women in the Atlantic Highlands Yacht Club had been regularly crewing in the club’s Wednesday night race series and jumped at the opportunity to join this race.



LuAnn Rathemacher and the Lithium Crew
Photo by Jeff Goldfarb

LuAnn and her crew have had a remarkable run taking first place honors in four out of the five Ms Race events hosted thus far. How does she do it? “By staying in clear air, having good boat speed, excellent crew work and knowing where the marks are, is the way to stay ahead.” Good straightforward advice from a seasoned sailor who grew up on the water. Her grandfather was a partner in building the Highlands Marina in 1958 and LuAnn frequently followed her father around the marina in the summer as he worked on (power) boats.

The idea for linking the Ms. Race to 180 Turning Lives Around came about in 2007. “Several of us were talking about making the Ms. Race into a fundraiser. One of my crew members, Jodi Dash, works as an art therapist for 180”, recalls Ms. Rathemacher. “Jodi suggested 180.” And it’s been a true partnership ever since. “180 has been very appreciative of our efforts, no matter how small or large our contributions were.”



Turning Lives Around
Photo by Jeff Goldfarb



Eileen Campbell & the Coda Crew
Photo by Jeff Smith

Throughout its history, the race has been contested under almost every imaginable condition, from high winds that tested the boats and crew to tranquil almost leisurely sails. Looking back to Ms. Race 2009, the excitement began even before the boats reached the starting line. Storms had just subsided but were still in the air. Eileen Campbell and her crew on Coda were heading for the starting line. The crew saw a young man in the water and without hesitation stopped their forward progression and began their man overboard (MOB) rescue. At this point the headline “Rescue in the Bay” sums up the story. Eileen and her crew weren’t thinking about it at the time but their heroism captured the true spirit of the Ms. Race. Coda went on to place 3rd overall in that year’s race.

Against the backdrop of its auspicious beginnings, Aleen Colitz wants to get more women engaged in this annual event. We want to increase participation in this year’s Ms. Race regatta and increase the fundraising for 180. The Club wholeheartedly welcomes woman sailors, their boats and their crews to participate in this year’s event scheduled for the weekend of August 21st. Learn more about the AHYC Ms. Race at our website ahyc.net/msrace.htm.