

The 2017 Ms. Race

POSTED BY WINDCHECK MAGAZINE 120SC ON OCTOBER 03, 2017

By Diane Kropfl and Bill Sabanski



Elaine Haher's team on her J/24 A Good Hair Day, claimed a second consecutive Ms. Race victory. As the 2017 Women's Champion, Haher received the NJYRA's Commodore's Cup. © Thomas Gardner

On Saturday, August 19, 2017 the Atlantic Highlands Yacht Club in Atlantic Highlands, NJ hosted the 13th annual Ms. Race, bringing together women of all ages to celebrate "Women on the Wind, the theme for this year's event.

Race day started with a Captain's meeting and breakfast courtesy of the generous sponsors followed by sailing instructions and a Ms. Race seminar. The 2017 edition of the race found crews anxious to get on the water, as the previous week found many of the crews on the bay jockeying each evening for practice and training.

Race time on the AHYC Olympic Circle found a light southeasterly breeze as the race got underway. About halfway through, crews were challenged by a substantial shift of the breeze to the north and diminishing winds. A major part of the Ms. Race is the large spectator fleet and festivities that surround it. Crews get a dockside sendoff, with a Bloody Mary cocktail party for family and friends. With many spouses, significant others and families on board, the fleet is far larger than the actual race. Spectators, friends and families are a major part of the event, having as much fun as the women in the race, cheering them on at each mark.

Elaine Hayer's J/24 *A Good Hair Day* took first place. This was the second consecutive Ms. Race win for Elaine, whose expertise as a J/24 racer includes years competing in one-design races, was instrumental to her achieving her third Ms. Race victory. Crediting the good teamwork of her racing crew, she is once again thrilled to be awarded The North Jersey Yacht Racing Association's prestigious Commodore's Cup, recognizing the NJYRA Women's Champion and presented to the top female skipper in the Ms. Race.



Team Ted, sailing Karen Harris' J/120 Cygni, crosses Overlap on their way to third place. © Thomas Gardner

Second place was claimed by *Overlap*, a Beneteau First 40.7 skippered by 19-year-old Lauren Pepsny. Third place went to Karen Harris and Team Ted on her J/120 *Cygni*. Each year, the Ms. Race welcomes women from the Atlantic Highlands Sailing Education Program. For 2017, Lauren Pepsny, a collegiate racer and graduate of the AHSEP program, drove *Overlap* to line honors. It was her third time as captain and featured a crew that included her three sisters and mother, Donna Syers, who is a past winner of the race. Lauren made custom T-shirts that all her teammates wore, with the AHYC Olympic Circle emblazoned on the back to ensure they stayed on course. "Unfortunately, our team read the wrong course last year and went speeding off in the wrong direction," shared Alyssa Pepsny, 17. "That was not a problem this year."

As for Karen Harris, this was her first Ms. Race on her J/120 *Cygni* with her crew, Team Ted. Last year, she and her partner Ted had purchased *Cygni* with dreams of sailing and racing her. Tragically, Ted passed away in April. Karen gathered her fortitude, and with support from friends and fellow racers she found the confidence to keep the boat and race at club events including the Ms. Race.

Karen and her team were full of pride for their excellent showing, and we are all proud of Karen's accomplishment. "As a volunteer for 180," said Karen. "I know the great work they do, so to take the helm of my boat without a coach for the very first time to sail in the Ms. Race was an extraordinary moment for me! I was thrilled to race with my family and friends and with terrific support from my fellow 180 volunteers."



The crew of Laura Oncea's Tartan 33 Confiscated ©Thomas Gardner

After the race, crews convened at the club for an awards ceremony and celebration including a charity auction. Proceeds from the Ms. Race benefit 180 Turning Lives Around, a New Jersey-based organization, which assists victims of sexual and domestic abuse and violence. Over the history of the Ms. Race, the event has raised more than \$115,000.

The Ms. Race has earned many accolades through the years, and the AHYC Ms. Race Committee is being honored by 180 at the annual Volunteer, Staff and Community Partners Reception with a "180 Award for Outstanding Community Service" award. For additional information on 180 and the Ms. Race, visit 180nj.org and ahyc.net.