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Shark River youth regatta in Belmar

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With strong winds of 15 knots blowing the young sailors around on the Shark River Friday, there were more than a few kids getting their heads knocked by booms, or getting their bodies dunked in the river two, perhaps three times when their boats capsized.



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Sailing students from the Friends of Belmar Harbor and recreation departments from Neptune, Neptune City, Belmar, Wall, Avon and Bradley Beach, race on the Shark River in Belmar Friday morning. (STAFF PHOTO: THOMAS P. COSTELLO)

Many children, aged 8 to 16, persevered as best they could in the racing competition between six towns whose recreation departments each year raise \$1,200 from local businesses to send eight sailing novices for three weeks of lessons under the Friends of Belmar Harbor mayors' trophy regatta program.

For others, the winds were too much and their college- and high school-aged instructors and race assistants towed them in. Despite their disappointment, they carefully dismantled their masts and booms, folded their sails, took off the rudders, pulled out the center boards, carried sails to a fenced boat yard, and got their boats properly stored on land as they had been taught the past three weeks.

At the end of the races and before Wall Township's eight participants on different boats won the trophy this year, head instructor Brian Ruhmann, praised both those who had to come in and those who stayed out on the water.

"For those of you who decided the winds were too much and came in, you have nothing to be ashamed of," Ruhmann said, pointing out one of the most valuable lessons in sailing is "knowing your limits."

He also commended those who were able to keep going and all of the sailors for their teamwork.

Alexis McIntyre, 12, of Wall, a seventh-grader at St. Rose Elementary School in Belmar, got hit in the temple by another boat's boom early on in the first of her three races. She was brought in, held something cold on her head, and 10 minutes later, was back in her boat, pushing off from the dock. She went on to earn third place in the second race and second place in the third race, she said.

The Friends of Belmar Harbor (FOBH), the nonprofit formed to enhance the Shark River Basin in Belmar, started the mayors' trophy regatta in 2005. Belmar won the trophy for four years, Neptune City last year and Wall on Friday.

The local recreation departments play a central role in raising the money and lining up kids to participate. Then Ruhmann, a chemistry teacher at Neptune High School most of the year, but the head sailing instructor for all of the FOBH sailing programs, takes over.

The regatta started with Avon, Belmar, Neptune City, Neptune and Wall, with Bradley Beach joining the year before last. FOBH owns the fleet of 38 boats at the L Street Beach marina, said Thomas Adcock, an FOBH trustee and Neptune City's recreation director.

The younger sailors Friday were on Optimists with mostly two to a boat but sometimes one. Older sailors sailed JY15s with two sails and usually a crew of three. Many of the older sailors were by themselves on the O'pen Bics with their see-through sails.

"I say this ship is cursed," said the soaking wet Jake Shotwell, 12, who lives in Ocean Grove and was towed in with his Neptune boat mates Danielle Fields, 12, Kenneth Alexander, 11, and Trevor McKeon, 11.

Sean Dillon, 19, of Belmar and a Stockton College sophomore who is in his second summer working on staff, said he was the "chase boat."

"I was the chase boat, chasing all the stray boats," said Dillon. "A few wanted to keep racing but some were scared of the wind, the water and wanted to come in. I think it was not exactly the right conditions for a race day."

"For our family, it's gotten us in touch with the water," said Mary Flynn, of Bradley Beach, whose two children, Katherine, 10, and Spencer, 8, fought the elements as long as they could with their sailing mates before being brought in.

"It was just a great experience for three weeks to sail on the Shark River and meet new friends and have a good time sailing," said Chris Monahan, 12, of Avon.
