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## Row With Champions - a Beautiful Regatta for a Cause

By Sophie Braccini



Photo Gint Federas

before, not even at the gym, but they could count on Oakland Strokes to drive a perfect event. The first teams arrived around 9 a.m. "People start with practicing on rowing machines," said Canyon John Heylin, who rowed in high school and at the University of Washington. He was training the beginners. "Normally it takes months to achieve perfect technique, and here they have a few minutes to get the basics." He added that it was like weight lifting: first the legs, then the back, then the arms. All the teams followed his instructions seriously, especially the young women on the synchronized swimming team that rowed in perfect unison.

Four organizations benefited from the fundraising event: the Oakland Strokes outreach program for inner-city kids that gives scholarships and has taught water safety to about 800 kids; Las Trampas, a program for adults with developmentally disabilities; Rotary Home Team that assists the elderly in their homes; and the Contra Costa Interfaith Housing that provides permanent and affordable housing and vital services for families in crisis.

Kelley Griest from Moraga was there with the "Girls In The Boat" team sponsored by Ernie Furtado. "We are just friends who hike or swim together," she said. "We are here to have fun." Nearby the Las Trampas teams were getting ready. The nonprofit put two boats in the race. Rowers included board members, staff members, and client Cristin Moore, who said she was very excited to participate. "The Sunrise Rotary is a big supporter of ours," said Executive Director Daniel Hogue. "It is our turn to support them."

Herbert was part of a team that included two former rowing Olympians, Peter Cipollone and Sebastian Bea, who was a rower on the 2000 U.S. Olympic team is now a Lafayette resident and father of two little girls and an Oakland Strokes board member. Bea continues to row recreationally, but once his team, called "Old Strokes," was in the water, it dominated its more novice competitors. The Moraga Hardware team, led by Val Snyder and consisting of middle-aged women who row together on Lake Merritt, gave Old Strokes a hard time. The two teams were looking forward to a rematch at the end of the day, but the race was stopped before they had the opportunity.

Dipak Roy never rowed before. His Fremont Bank team of beginners finished second in his group and he said he enjoyed the experience. "It is an interesting discipline where you really have to follow directions and work together," he said, slightly out of breath after his race.

Once in the water, different teams did very differently, but all finished the 250-meter race and

With temperatures in the 70s and a light breeze, it looked like it was going to be a perfect day for the first all-level rowing regatta sponsored by Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary and Oakland Strokes last Saturday, Aug. 22 at San Pablo Reservoir in Orinda. According to Daniel Herbert, who is a member of both groups, it had never been done before: putting people who have never rowed through a 15-minute crash training course and sending them onto the water to compete.

The music, the food and the location made for a fun event, all in support of four good causes. But even the most organized event can be undone by bad weather. At the end of the meet, as the wind picked up, the last race had to be canceled, leaving a few teams disappointed.

Twenty-eight teams registered a boat in the race. Most of the participants had never rowed

there was no notable accident or boat capsizing. Oakland Strokes provided the boats as well as a coxswain and two experienced rowers for each boat.

Lamorinda Weekly had also assembled a team, including reporter Cathy Tyson, who used to row in her college years. "I was really looking forward to being back on the water," said Tyson. "I remember at the end of my training season how strong and confident I felt." But things didn't turn out as expected for the team.

"We met, fueled up, we practiced and marched to the shoreline to admire our eight-person shell - and that's as far as it went. After patiently waiting for our pros to appear, word came via radio that the final heat would be scrubbed due to wind conditions," said another Lamorinda Weekly teammate, Cathy Dausman. The team was disappointed but kept their sense of humor.

"All dressed up and no place to row," said Tyson. "At least we keep our perfect record - undefeated," added Daniel Smith. Upbeat and practical, Victor Ryerson concluded, "We have a year to practice."

Five teams could not compete, and the finals never took place due to the windy conditions.

Herbert felt the race helped people gain a deeper understanding of the teamwork required to propel a boat. "Rowing is the ultimate team sport, and there are more scholarship athletes coming out of rowing than any other sport," he said. "Oakland Strokes was a great partner bringing boats, rowers, coxswains, a lot of coaching to our participants and running the regatta on the water. I think we even set up some friendly rivalries for next year as I heard teams coming off the dock saying they wanted a rematch. We plan to have another Row With Champions next year."



Photo Gint Federas



Team "Girls in the Boat" Photo Sophie Braccini

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