

38TH ANNUAL SWIM AROUND KEY WEST

Endurance event set for Saturday morning

CITIZEN STAFF

KEY WEST – More than 170 swimmers will travel to Smathers Beach Saturday morning to compete in the 38th annual Swim Around Key West, beginning at 8:30 a.m.

The 12.5-mile endurance swim will include competitors from 23 states, including California, Colorado, Missouri, Texas and Vermont. Six swimmers will travel from Cork, Ireland, to compete, as well as international swimmers from China and the Cayman Islands.

Florida will send entrants from 43 different towns and cities with participants swimming the circumference of the island individually or in teams of two or three.

Eighty swimmers will attempt the

event solo this year, each accompanied by a kayak or support boat that will provide protection from motorized watercrafts and carry food and drinks for the swimmers. The swimmers may not touch or hold onto the kayak at any time, or stand up or touch the ocean bottom. No fins, snorkels, wet suits, body suits or devices that give extra buoyancy, propulsion or skin protection are allowed.

The majority of solo swimmers will complete the distance in five to six hours, but participants have as long as eight hours before the course closes.

In addition to the solo event, 10 two-person relay teams and 23 three-person relays are entered in the race. Relay teams generally charter a motorboat to transport



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Participants get set on Smathers Beach for the 37th annual Swim Around Key West. The 38th edition of the event will begin at 8 a.m. Saturday at Smathers Beach.

team members between entry points. There are no land entries for swimmers.

Two-person relay members will each swim six miles continuously, and three-person team members

will swim four miles each.

The event starts and finishes at the west end of Smathers Beach on the Atlantic side of Key West.

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Swim Around Key West route

Swim

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The first wave of swimmers will take off at 8:30 a.m., with the official start at 9 a.m. Slower swimmers can take the extra half hour to assure favorable tides through Key West Harbor, Fleming Cut and Cow Key Channel.

Last year, the event raised \$3,000 with funds going to the Key West High School cross country team.

The historic, round-the-island event is the longest-running sporting event in the Florida Keys. It was founded in 1977 by Anna Fugina, who began swimming as therapy

to assist recovery from a car accident. She completed the first swim in 12 hours, 59 minutes, improving to eight hours the following year due to careful consideration of tidal currents.

Fugina remains an active part of the event. The 62-year-old will swim in the solo division this year along with race organizer Bill Welzien, who will be making his 60th trek around the island.

The current record finishing time is 3:31:28 set by Gabe Lindsey in 1999. A handful of the 170 entrants in Saturday's event will be hoping to break that mark, or at least become the 38th winner of the swim around.