

SET TO GET WET

Race lineup set as event approaches

BY J.W. COOKE
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KEY WEST — The entry list for the 39th annual Swim Around Key West on June 6 filled faster than race organizer Bill Welzien said it ever has in his 13 years arranging the 12.5-mile race.

"Every year it seems to fill up quicker," said Welzien. "So the word is out and it's something every year people are excited to do."

Roughly 200 swimmers registered from around the country and world to partake in the event — a majority going as solo swimmers along with 13 three-person teams and 12 two-person squads.

"We have tabs on every category and we take up to 100 solo swimmers," said Welzien. "We were 12 hours shy of registration being up for a week and we were capped

out with solo swimmers. Now every category is sold out."

The race will consist of two starting waves; the first wave begins from the west end of Smathers at 10:30 a.m. and the second wave at 11, with the race having a 6:30 p.m. cut off after eight hours in the water. The eight hours in

well short of race creator Anna Fugina's first circumference of the island, which she completed the swim in 12:59:00. After studying the tidal current so she would not swim against the outgoing tide, Fugina trekked it again a year later and finishing in eight hours.

"Because of the tides this is probably the latest we've ever started," said Welzien. "The first start is for the slower swimmers so it keeps everybody moving through the harbor and there

are no stragglers. Once they get through the Fleming Cut Bridge, there is really not a lot of boat traffic from that point on."

The current record finishing time is 3:31:28 set by Gabe Lindsey in 1999. Any first-place swimmer who beats that record time will be rewarded with \$1,000 at the

awards ceremony.

"I don't really have any hints to who will win it this year," said Welzien. "We have five different countries represented."

"I have also completed 64 career swims to date," added Welzien. "I will be aiming for my 65th career swim on June 6. This is especially interesting as I turned 65 this past April. So I will seek to match my number of swims to my number of

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Swim

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years on the planet."

A prerace meeting for all swimmers will be held on June 5 at 6 p.m., following the registration from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the race headquarters in a large tent set up on the south end of Smathers Beach, near the start/finish line.

"We will be going over the course, the rules, safety issues, skin protection and all types of stuff," said Welzien.

A portion of the race fees from the entrants will return to the community in the form of a donation to the Key West High cross country team.

"Last year, we gave \$3,750 to the team after we paid all the bills," said Welzien. "This year I'm hoping to get 4,000 bucks to the team for them to use for transportation, uniforms or whatever they need the money for."

While the entries are all full along with a complete slate of support kayakers, Welzien said they are still looking for committee

boats to help throughout the course. For information on how to volunteer call the committee boat commander Don Nelson at 305-745-3027.

"That's the only thing we are lacking at this point," said Welzien. "We have the permits from the city, the Coast Guard signed off on us and they will have a couple of their boats out there, but other than the committee boats we are ahead and we are just making sure all of our Is are dotted and Ts are crossed."

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