

SWIMMING: 41ST SWIM AROUND KEY WEST

Round and Round Again



RON COOKE/The Citizen

Swimmers and support kayaks pass near the Edward B. Knight Pier (formerly White Street Pier) in last year's 40th annual Swim Around Key West. The 41st edition is slated to begin at 7:15 a.m., Saturday, off Smathers Beach.

Nearly 175 to follow in the strokes of Fugina

BY J.W. COOKE
Key West Citizen

KEY WEST — In 1977, Anna Fugina swam her first circumference of the island as part of a therapy program to help in her recovery from a car accident. Without the knowledge of tides and currents, it would take her 12 hours and 59 minutes to complete the 12.5-mile course. But it started a trend and during Saturday morning's 41st edition of the Swim

Around Key West, Fugina will be joined by roughly 175 swimmers from 27 states and seven countries.

"When I talked to Anna this morning, she said when she first jumped in from Mallory Square on the Fourth of July, she had no idea what this was going to become," said race organizer Bill Welzien. "We have one guy, Bill Hazelton, who will be making his 10th swim and it's kind of cool when people make this part of their regular cal-

endar year."

More than 100 swimmers will attempt the event solo this year, accompanied by 11 two-person relays, who will each swim six miles continuously, and 18 three-person relay teams, who will swim four miles each, starting from Smathers Beach at 7:15 a.m. The relay teams will be escorted by motorboats to transport teams between entry points, while the solo swimmer

See **SWIMMING**, page 3B

Swimming

Continued from page 1B

will be accompanied by support kayakers as there is no touching of land or the kayaks during the race.

"I looked at the weather a little bit ago and the wind seems like it will drop down a little bit and I didn't see any forecasts for rain, so that's a good sign," said Welzien. "I think the wind is expect to be around 15 (mph) out of the south, so, as we come out of Sigsbee, we might get a head wind, but it will be doable."

Included in the solo competitors is two-time champion Nicholas Perfetti as well as Welzien, who will be completing his 90th circumference of the island in his quest for 100 career swims.

"After this one, I'll have 10 left, so that's really good," Welzien said about continuing his goal of reaching 100.

Fugina, who has competed as part of a relay in the past few years, will also be returning to the solo distance, in which the record time of 3:31:28 was set in 1999 by Gabe Lindsey.

"Somebody asked me, 'How could somebody swim around the island in three and half hours?' and I said I don't know," said Welzien. "We don't have any elite swimmers that I know of this



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Nicholas Perfetti swims under the Cow Key Bridge last year. On Saturday, the New York resident will try for his third title in the 41st annual Swim Around Key West. Perfetti won the 12.5-mile race in 2014 and last year with a time of 3:20.

year, but Nick, is back to try to regain the title."

There are also 18 international competitors are from Guatemala, Canada, Cayman Islands, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom that have entered along with swimmers from 27 states, including Colorado, Washington, Kansas, Texas, Rhode Island and Minnesota. Florida will send entrants from 41 different towns and cities.

Final registration for the 41st annual race will be from 3 to 5:30 p.m., today, at the tent on Smathers Beach and the prerace meeting will be at 6 p.m. No fins, snorkels, wet suits, body suits or devices that give extra

buoyancy, propulsion or skin protection are allowed and a majority of the solo swimmers will complete the distance in five to six hours, but participants have as long as eight hours before the course closes.

"The Coast Guard is aware of what's happening. If they (the swimmers) are not under Fleming Cut Bridge by 10:15, the current will probably start working against them," said Welzien, who was able to present \$4,000 to the Key West High School cross country team from funds raised from the event. "We just want everybody on the water to extra careful and aware of all the swimmers and kayakers on the water."

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