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12.5-Mile Endurance Swim Around Key West Takes Place Saturday

(Key West, Fla.) – Approximately 175 swimmers from seven countries and 27 states will travel to Key West, Fla., this week to compete in the 41st Annual Swim Around Key West on Saturday beginning at 7:15 a.m. on Smathers Beach. Participants in the 12.5-mile endurance event will swim the circumference of the island individually or in teams of two or three.

More than 100 swimmers will attempt the event solo this year, with two-time winner Nicolas Perfetti, 29, from New York, N.Y. returning to defend his title. Four-time champion Bill Welzien, 67, of Sugarloaf Key, who is also the organizer of the event, will aim to complete his 90th career swim around Key West during the event.

Each solo swimmer must be accompanied by a kayak or support boat that will provide protection from motorized watercrafts and carry food and drinks for the swimmer. The swimmer 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, 11 two-person relay teams and 18 three-person relays are entered in the race. Relay teams generally charter a motorboat to transport team members between entry points. There are no land entries for swimmers. Two-person relay members will each swim 6 miles continuously and three-person team members will swim 4 miles each.

The 18 international competitors are from Guatemala, Canada, Cayman Islands, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom. Twenty-seven states will be represented, including Colorado, Washington, Kansas, Texas, Rhode Island and Minnesota. Florida will send entrants from 41 different towns and cities.

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 8 hours the following year due to careful consideration of tidal currents. Fugina has swum in the event every year, and the 65-year-old will attempt the solo distance again on Saturday. The current record finishing time is 3:31:28 set by Gabe Lindsey in 1999.

The event starts and finishes at the west end of Smathers Beach on the Atlantic side of Key West, Fla. The first wave of swimmers will take off at 7:15 a.m., with the official start at 7:45 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 \$4,000 that benefited the Key West High School Cross Country team. This year's Sponsors include Refreshment Services Pepsi, Key West Southernmost Runners, Keys Evangelistic Ministries, Low Key Supply, Urbancrest Baptist Church, Key West Chiropractic, Born to Swim, SolRx, Ripley's Believe It or Not!, Sunset Watersports and Centennial Bank. Additionally, many fine businesses in the Key West community have made generous donations of gift certificates.

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