



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Covered in zinc oxide, Bill Welzien prepares to enter the water for the 36th annual Swim Around Key West in 2012.

PROVING AGE IS JUST A NUMBER

Welzien going for 65th completion of 12.5-mile course

BY J.W. COOKE

Key West Citizen

KEY WEST — A total of 170 racers are scheduled to enter the 39th annual Swim Around Key West today including event organizer Bill Welzien, who will be looking to complete the 12.5-mile course for the 65th time at age 65.

"I always look for these little goals," Welzien said. "So when I got to 60 in last year's race, I figured I only had to do two more in the fall and two in the spring to set it up for this."

He accomplished lap No. 63 on April 20 and No. 64 on May 6, in six hours and 30 minutes, to set up his opportunity to make his swims match his age.

"Turning 65 is kind of significant," Welzien said. "When you turn 18 you have to sign up for the selective service and you remember that. When you turn 21 you are considered an official adult, so those are significant transitions and 65 is too. You get your Medicare card, whether you want to get it or not."

In order to get to this point, Welzien first completed 30 swims in 30 consecutive months beginning in December 2008.

Despite reaching his goal, Welzien has no plans of slowing down.

"The window is getting smaller so I want to get as much through as I can," he said. "I have to bank as

Swim

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many as I can now, because I don't know if I'll be out here at 85 still swimming around the island."

He said he plans to try one more swim later this month and then three swims in July, under the blue moon.

"When I swim, it's either around a new moon or a full moon, because the tides are the best," Welzien said. "I will go for the first full moon in the beginning of July, the new moon in the middle of the month and the next full moon."

In fact, Welzien uses that same mentality for the annual race, as the most recent full moon was Tuesday.

"We are a little late, but it's close enough," said Welzien, who is in his 13th year of organizing the race.

If Welzien is able to complete all the swims planned in the new months, he said he is likely to return to the Sea of Galilee — which he swam across, a total of 14 miles, north to south — but this time trek the short distance back and forth for a 16-mile journey.

"Then first time I went there was after I finished the 30 swims in 30 months, so I was looking for something else to do," Welzien said. "That's freshwater, so it's a lot harder because you're not as buoyant and there is no tidal assistance."

His goal for today's race is to break six hours, which would be roughly 30 minutes faster than his most recent completion in April.

"If I get six and half that's fine, the main thing is to finish," said Welzien, who will swim with the 11 a.m. wave of racers. There will be a first wave that begins at 10:30 a.m. from the southern point of Smathers Beach.

Welzien said he is hoping to have the entire field, which includes 85 solo swimmers, through Key West harbor and past Fleming Cut Bridge by 2 p.m.

"After that, the windows will begin to close because the current will begin to change," Welzien said. "We will have people stationed on top of the Fleming Bridge so we have an accurate count. If somebody doesn't go though by 2 o'clock, and the current starts going against them, we will have the committee boat there to help



Each number represents a mile marker for the 12.5-mile race that begins with the first wave of swimmer at 10:30 and the second at 11 a.m., from Smathers Beach.

get them out. We will have another group at the Cow Key Channel Bridge to make sure they all get through there, too."

Initially, Welzien was going for his most recent goal as part of a 200-person field, but injuries and

family obligations cut the entries by 30.

"That's fine because it's easier to manage, and the swimmers get to feel like more than just a number," Welzien said. "When you run the Boston Marathon it's a big deal,

but there are thousands and thousands of people. Here, it's a lot more personal and I really get to help each swimmer understand the race like I know it. That makes it fun for me."

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