

RACE OF THE AGES

By Pam Miller

On Saturday, January 20th, the Venice Women's Sailing Squadron and the Venice Youth Boating Association held an Inaugural Regatta where sailors from the ages of 9 to 83 years old competed against each other. Two classes of boats raced with six sailors in the Sunfish fleet and 10 sailors in the International Optimist Dinghy (Opti) fleet.

Both clubs have co-existed out of the Pram Shed located by Higel Park since 1976 but this is the first time the young sailors and the ladies have competed against each other. The kids threw down the gauntlet at a fundraising pancake breakfast where some of the lady sailors attended with the kids serving breakfast. The young sailors were surprised to learn that these were the woman who sailed the Opti boats like they did. A plan was soon hatched by the VYBA Director Tara Foster and the VWSS Captain Pam Miller to find a mutual date for a competition.

The scheduled day of the races proved to be cool and overcast with the continual threat of rain but that didn't dissuade the young sailors or the ladies from being ready to see who would come out on top. Tara Foster was the Principal Race Officer for the day and she set up a course on Roberts Bay; Sylvia Turner, a long term member of the Bitter Ends, joined Tara on the committee boat to help set the marks and serve as scorer. A safety boat was also on the water to help in case anyone capsized in the very cold water and a spectator boat came out to cheer on the sailors.

The Sunfish fleet finished 4 races, while the Optis completed 3 races. It was fun to see how all the kids were right up on the start line and navigated their boats easily back and forth for good positioning, something the woman sailors work to strive for. The Sunfish races were so close that the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place finishers were only separated by one point each.

On one of the Opti races, a sailor committed an infraction resulting in a protest where Past Captain Ann Carroll of the Bitter Ends was able to serve as a witness and recount what occurred from her perspective on the water. Sailing, unlike other sports, does not have any referee on the water so sailors can protest when they feel another sailor has committed a foul. The sailor can choose to do a penalty on the water, typically two 360 turns on the water, or continue sailing and go to the protest committee after racing is completed. In this case, the sailor that was protested was found to have committed a foul which then impacted their overall score because they were disqualified in that race.

The Venice Youth Boating Association is a year round program for sailors from 8-18 years old, with a summer program where sailors as young as 6 can learn how to sail. The kids practice twice a week and compete in regattas both locally and statewide. Prior to practices, the coaches have 'chalk talks' where sailing techniques and strategies are discussed and then practiced on the water. Since its inception in 1952, VYBA has taught 5000 young children how to sail and has also produced 2 Olympic class sailors. For more information on the VYBA, visit www.veniceyouthboating.com or contact Tara Foster at 941-468-1719.

The Venice Women's Sailing Squadron races every Wednesday on Roberts Bay from September through May. Women interested in the club should visit www.bitterendsvenice.com to learn about how to get involved.

Race Results:

Sunfish Fleet: 1st Place (Pam Miller – VWSS), 2nd Place (Alyssa Tungstma – VYBA), 3rd Place (Carol Fauls)

Opti Fleet: 1st Place (Jack Carter – VYBA), 2nd Place (Ann Carroll – VWSS), 3rd Place (Trey Featherston)