



The Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race

by L&A Chesapeake Cruisers

Mike Maraziti's ship has come in, but if he doesn't hurry, it will soon leave without him. The *Mystic Whaler*, along with her captain, crew and other sponsors/guests are prepared to cast off from Broadway Pier in Fells Point, MD as they await the arrival of "One Eyed Mike" of local restaurant fame. In true pirate fashion he's arrived in the nick of time bearing gifts for the ship, including a distinctive bottle of premium liquor from his stock.

Not surprising, as his bar/restaurant is "home of the world's first Grand Marnier Club." The gangway is stowed, the lines are hastily pulled and the 110-foot tall ship gets underway. They are joined by over 35 other vessels for the Inner Harbor Parade of Sail marking the 18th Annual "Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race" (GCBSR).

The evolution of the Schooner Race can truly be described as a work-in-progress, as its origins belie its current status. Although schooner racing has deep roots in maritime tradition created by fierce trade rivalries, the GCBSR started as a more amiable bar bet between Captain Lane Briggs of the tugantine *Norfolk Rebel* and Captain Jan Miles of *Pride of Baltimore II*. It has since evolved into a friendly competition between the private owners and professional captains of schooners of every size, age, rig and home port.

The festivities start in Fells Point the previous weekend with a blind-folded dinghy race. Wednesday is usually the big day, commencing with an on-site education program for middle-school students who study maritime history/ship construction from a state approved curriculum. The fun continues that same afternoon with the Parade of Sail followed by an All Hands Party for captains, crew and volunteers that runs into the late evening and includes chantey singing. The next morning's briefing sends the vessels underway to Annapolis for the start of the race. Two Naval

Academy YP (yard patrol) boats serve as the starting marks as the four classes of ships are called.

The finishing times on this 120-mile jaunt from Annapolis to Norfolk/Portsmouth, VA have been

as varied as the October winds in the Chesapeake. Some races have taken more than 20 hours to complete, while other years have produced exhausted skippers and crew of vessels that finished under 12 hours! Regardless of the race conditions, the pig roast and awards ceremony that cap this event are a welcome sight to all participants.

For some vessels, the end of this race is a stepping-off point for the southbound snowbirds, while others take a leisurely pace northward, stopping for some spin-off events: the Cambridge Schooner Rendezvous, then finally

Downrigging Weekend for the schooner *Sultana* in Chestertown, MD.

There is no purse for this race - just trophies and bragging rights for the skippers. The proceeds benefit

the education programs in Fells Point and Portsmouth as well as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and other regional ecological organizations. There are no paid positions - just a navy of over 150 volunteers from both towns that work the better part of 10 months to plan and execute this event.

The ultimate mission of the Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race is to “Save the Bay” by promoting awareness of our maritime tradition and the

ongoing need for ecological conservation. The race is always open to vessels that are schooner rigged and any hands that want to help! 🇺

