

PENSACOLA News Journal

Sailors set their sights for Cuba

Pensacola a la Habana Race set for 2 p.m. Sunday

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Pensacola sailors are once again preparing to make the 511-nautical mile trip to Cuba for the second annual “friendly sailing competition.”

The Pensacola a la Habana Race, a Satori Foundation event, starts at 2 p.m. Sunday, with 21 vessels registered to participate.

Six boats hail from the Pensacola area, including Leo Ticheli's Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 40, Valentine. Ticheli, a first-time competitor, has been sailing for five years. In addition to his wife, Belinda, friends Kelli Lagos and David Smith round out the crew. Although they always try to get the most out of their vessel, 'we're interested only in competing against ourselves, so you won't find us on the racing circuit,' he said.

Ticheli's goal is 'to have fun, eat Cuban food, take a million photographs, and make friends with the Cuban people,' he said.

What Ticheli may lack in racing experience, he makes up for in preparedness. His gear includes both a life raft and a life boat, and multiple redundancies in electronics, including battery operated devices.

'Most importantly, we've got no schedule and we won't hesitate to run from bad weather,' Ticheli said.

The Pensacola Yacht Club (PYC) signed a Sailing Friendship Agreement with Jose Diaz Escrich, commodore of the Hemmingway International Yacht Club, in Havana, Cuba to co-host the friendly sailing competition every other year. Escrich will be in Pensacola for the start of the race.

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The Pensacola a la Habana Race, a Satori Foundation event, gets underway at 2 p.m. Sunday in Pensacola Bay.

Sailors

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Vessels range from Richard Bearman's 35-foot Pleiades from Maryland, to Lillian, Alabama resident Chris Lopez's Voices in the Sky, 63-foot Oyster. Skippers registered in either the racing or cruising fleet. In order to 'encourage the spirit of cruising,' PYC's Race Committee modified rules and rating adjustments, providing a Classic Cruiser and Modern Cruiser Division. Those divisions have nine contenders each. Three are signed up in the racing fleet.

One of just four boat owners making his second run to Cuba is Tim Cerniglia of New Orleans. Having placed fourth overall in the Classic Cruising Division in the inaugural race, Cerniglia's goal 'is is to improve my finish time.' He owns Radio Flyer, a redhulled Valiant 40.

Three weeks before the race, three of Tim's crew members had to drop out, leaving him scrambling for replacements including Pensacolians Sue Stephenson and her husband, Don Robinson.

'My seasoned crew members, George Davis and Kevin Housh are aboard,'" he began, "but I am picking up two people whom I have never met.'

Cerniglia has a personal connection to Cuba. His mother and her siblings were raised there while their parents worked for a sugar mill owned by an American company before Castro took over. Years later, his mother helped Cuban refugees resettle in the U.S, 'first by shopping for clothes, then housing, jobs, school, and eventually with the building of a mausoleum for Cubans to bury their family members,' he recalled.

Local residents can follow the race in real time, thanks to Visit Pensacola, which provided an electronic tracker from YB Tracking for each competitor. Log onto www.PensacolaHavanaRace.com for more information.

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