

Newport *this week*

Mitchell Memorial Day Regatta Honors Late Commodore

By ohtadmin on May 18, 2017

By Lisa McCurdy

Former Newport Yacht Club Commodore Cliff Mitchell left his mark in more ways than one.

“He was certainly a character,” said Roy Guay, the Offshore Committee Chair Person at Newport Yacht Club.

Mitchell, who lost a leg to diabetes and wore an American flag-printed prosthesis, led the Newport Yacht Club as commodore from 1995 to 1996. But his longest-lasting mark at the club is the creation of two regattas that bookend the sailing season; one on Memorial Day weekend, the other during Columbus Day Weekend. Both regattas follow a course from Newport to Block Island and will be held for the 34th straight year.

The Mitchell family has deep ties to Block Island, with Mitchell spending his childhood and later years there. The easy day-sail from Newport makes it an ideal destination for the end of races that Mitchell founded in honor of his father and grandfather. Since his passing in 2011, the Mitchell Memorial Regatta also includes a nod to Cliff.

This year, the regatta will begin on Saturday, May 27, with the slowest boats starting the 21-mile course to Block Island at 9 am, followed by faster boats in order of their PHRF handicap scores. “Starting boats this way means everyone arrives to Block Island at about the same time on Saturday afternoon,” Guay said.

Approximately 20 boats are expected to attend the regatta, while there are generally 10 additional participants on Columbus Day weekend.

The event is also open to motor boats, with participants invited to join in on the social events following the race. Upon arrival, skippers and crew are invited to share in a finish-line beer and barbecue at

Payne's dock. On Sunday, the day starts with a Bloody Mary contest, continues with a cooking contest involving appetizers, and ends with the prizes being presented in the late afternoon.

The top three finishers receive awards, while the "Cliff Mitchell Trophy," is given to the fourth-place boat. "Cliff always said that winning fourth place is about as good as kissing your sister," Guay said.

The event also fosters a collaboration among the boats. On the night before the start, boats are placed on teams made up of one boat from each of the start times. Their time scores are added up after the event, and the team with the lowest combined times wins a special team trophy.

While weather and wind direction dictate the length and challenge of the event, the focus is on friendly competition and celebrating the start of summer. "It's really a great excuse to get out to Block Island early in the season," Guay said. "It's something people at the club look forward to every year."

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