

Newport *this week*

Sailing for A Cause

ON THE WATERFRONT

By ohtadmin on May 25, 2017

By Lisa McCurdy

Within the five minutes it takes a full regatta starting sequence to count down, two patients in the United States are diagnosed with blood cancer. Participants and fundraisers in Leukemia Cup regattas that are held throughout the year hope they will help reduce or eliminate that staggering statistic through their support of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society (LLS). More than 170,000 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma each year. "Everyone knows someone who has been touched by blood cancers, whether a friend or a family member has been ill or they themselves have been diagnosed," said Gary Jobson, national chairman of the Leukemia Cup Regatta, one of many fundraising arms of LLS. "It's an important cause to be aware of and to support."

The upcoming Rhode Island Chapter's Leukemia Cup, hosted by the New York Yacht Club, will take place on June 3-4 at Harbour Court, the club's Newport location. In 2016, the event raised more than \$190,000, and the sights are set equally high this year.

The 23rd annual Leukemia Cup weekend will begin with a welcome gala at Harbour Court on Saturday evening. The regatta will start at noon Sunday. There will not be a starting signal after 3 p.m. Currently, 33 boats are registered for the event, with more expected to join as the regatta draws closer.

The Leukemia Cup will culminate in a post-sailing barbeque and awards ceremony on the Harbour Court lawn. The entire event, including racing, is open to the public.

"There is definitely room for the Rhode Island event to grow," says Jobson, who points as an example to the San Francisco LLS chapter, which regularly raises \$500,000.

At each Leukemia Cup event, a survivor of blood cancer joins the regatta as the "honored skipper." This year's honoree is a young girl named Belle, who was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia.

For over two years, Belle received weekly chemotherapy, bone marrow biopsies and blood transfusions. The chemotherapy limited her mobility and prevented her from walking. Once Belle regained her strength, steroids caused fractures in her tibia and femur, leaving her wheelchair-bound. Despite her many setbacks, she finished chemotherapy in February 2015. Belle and her family will join participants and fundraisers at Harbour Court for the event.

The year of the Leukemia Cup regattas culminates in an invite-only event for individuals who have raised more than \$15,000. Dubbed the “Fantasy Sail,” the 2017 regatta will be held in Annapolis, Md., on October 27-29. Participants will have the opportunity to sail with Jobson on Chesapeake Bay, as well as enjoy a number of social activities, culminating in a raffle drawing for a \$1,000 West Marine shopping spree, a Moorings yacht charter and a trip for two to Bermuda.

The 2017 Fantasy Sail will also celebrate Jobson’s 25 years of service as national chairman of the Leukemia Cup Regatta campaign. He joined the board in 1994, and served as chairman, even through his own diagnosis of lymphoma in 2003. A world-class sailor with a lengthy resume, Jobson also boasts a number of other accolades, including Emmy awards for his coverage of the 1988 Olympic sailing regatta and the 2005-06 Volvo Ocean Race. His involvement in the Leukemia Cup, and in particular the Fantasy Sail, has boosted participation and fundraising for LLS.

Those interested in participating or simply fundraising can visit leukemicup.org/ri/.

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