

column

Challenge accepted

What does your September 22nd look like? Well, change it. That's the day of the ferryboat race in Oxford. Miss that and you might as well call your year a flop. Never heard of a ferryboat race? Where've you been? Ferryboats race all over the place ... you didn't know that? The Oxford race will actually be "The 324th Running of the Talbot Cup Ferryboat Race."

I'm told the boat with the history of the other 323 races hit a day-marker and sank taking with it the history of the other competitions and nobody can remember any the details ... ferryboat races being one of those events one wakes up the next day not remembering much about. Actually, I'd never heard of a ferryboat race either so that makes several of us. I'm not even sure who came up with the idea of a 324th running, but somebody did and now it's going to happen ... on September 22nd. And a happening it will be.

Reestablishing the ferryboat race (there must be a record of those other 323 runnings somewhere) was cooked up by some of the Oysterville Yacht Club heavies. You know about the OYC. I wrote about it a few months back. When I say "Oysterville Yacht Club heavies," I'm referring to girth not rank.

For those of you among the incognoscenti, the OYC is a superb organization of amazing constituency. Founded in Oysterville, Massachusetts (find that in your Rand McNally) by some very forward-thinking individuals, the OYC is for folks who don't necessarily own white slacks and a blue blazer but definitely own a good pair of well-worn boat shoes. If you don't mind making a contribution to the Cam Neely Foundation for Cancer Care, then you too can be a member of the OYC, sport the attractive burgee, and enjoy the company of people who do not know the meaning of pretention. (For membership information email your name and address to oyc-nyot@comcast.net.) Anyway, the OYC crowd lacks

Dockside



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enough to do and comes up with some off-the-wall ideas ... ferryboat races being the most OTW to date.

Meanwhile, back at the races, a challenge went forth. Anybody with the, uh, anatomic fortitude, to take on the ferry "Talbot," a speedy vessel which plies the Tred Avon River between Oxford and the Eastern Shore megalopolis, Bellevue, in a closed-course race, put-up or shut-up. Well, while those of us belonging to Oxford Station of the OYC, were drinking to the obvious lack of courage on the part of ferryboat operators worldwide, somebody put-up.

Over at the "Suicide Bridge Restaurant" near Hurlock, there's a couple of sternwheelers that haul tourists up and down the Choptank River. The vessels' owner, obviously delusional, ventured that his boats might just whup that ferryboat. Well, once we got past the ignominy of a ferryboat racing sternwheelers, and a few more libations, it started to sound like a pretty good idea. Those paddlers are about the same size as the ferryboat though certainly not as sleek and aerodynamic: they might just offer a good test.

The challenge was accepted. The race is on. Tickets will be sold offering crew positions on the respective vessels. Proceeds from the race will be divided up between the Cam Neely Foundation, the Oxford Fire Company, and the Richardson Maritime Museum in Cambridge, good causes all. A triangular course will be laid out off Oxford. The "Dorothy Megan" and the "Choptank River Queen," the sternwheelers will sail down the Choptank past Cambridge and turn right down the Tred Avon and meet the ferry "Talbot" off the town dock and ferry landing.

If you've signed up as crew, your

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ticket gets you a luncheon after the race aboard the sternwheelers, catered by the Suicide Bridge Restaurant, a gathering place known for its succulent seafood and knock-your-socks-off crabcakes. Crew positions will go for a hundred-dollar contribution. We'll let you know the details about tickets and such as soon as we figure it out ourselves. The website www.ferryboatraces.com will soon be up and running and will have all the pertinent details.

Now, back to the races. Oxford is famous for its quietitude. Actually, we advertise this attribute. Whereas St. Michaels touts its dancing in the streets and cacophonous celebration, Oxford is a place of serenity. You can actually converse with your companions as you stroll down the shaded avenues. Lovers sit on the benches in the park whispering sweet nothings ... and they can actually hear the sweet nothings. Occasionally a barking dog breaks the silence but everyone knows the dog is a lovable brute and is merely signaling to others of his kind that all is okay; this is, after all, Oxford.

So why the heck would a place like this have a ferryboat race? Actually, we don't like to advertise it much, but we Oxonians are really a party-bunch. You just have to have a strange sense of party. See, we're mostly sailboat folks around here or reformed sailboat folks. And you know what that means: party-on.

This ferryboat race is going to be a party. The whole town's going to be jumping and jiving. Just to keep things lively, on race day we're going to invite a few folks over from St. Michaels to play, sort of like adding Tabasco to your cream-of-wheat. I'm not certain of this, but some of my friends who do know of these things, have seen some interesting folks with New Jersey license plates

hanging around down at the ferry dock and talking on cell phones. Of course, gaming of that sort will be discouraged. A ferryboat race is known to be wholesome sport. And for those for whom "mal de mer" is a concern, you won't get seasick watching from the shore ... and there will be plenty of places to do that. And plenty of places to get good food ashore too.

September 22nd is going to be a day to remember. There will be boats and folks and fun and food and a lot of good will. The Oxford Station of the Oysterville Yacht Club, the preeminent venue of that esteemed organization, is going to make "The 324th Running of the Talbot Cup Ferryboat Race" an occasion that will be noted far and wide ... or at least as far as Baltimore. You can be a part of this event. Tickets will go on sale soon and crew positions are limited so commit early.

The Richardson Maritime Museum in Cambridge preserves the maritime history of Cambridge and Dorchester County, which is rich with boatbuilding, watermen and their craft, privateers and Revolutionary War patriots. The Oxford Fire Company provides fire, rescue, and emergency medical services to citizens of Oxford, the surrounding area and assistance to the remainder of Talbot County. The Cam Neely Foundation has raised over \$16 million since its inception. You are guaranteed to have fun and your contribution to these causes will be greatly appreciated. ⚓

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