

WindCheck

Sailing the Northeast

Two-Up to Key West

The Forbidden Coast

Foiling at NESS



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Elaine Maher

A Past Commodore of Atlantic Highlands Yacht Club in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Elaine Maher is a longtime member of the organizing committee for the Ms. Race, an amazing charity race for all-women crews that AHYC has proudly hosted since 2005. An accomplished J/24 skipper and three-time Ms. Race winner, she serves as the event's Principal Race Officer and shares her expertise in pre-race Skippers' Talks.

"I was born in Staten Island and first started sailing at Richmond County Yacht Club at the age of eight on Penguins," says Elaine. "Our instructor was Mr. Knudsen, who always said, 'Push the tiller away from you or towards you.' I moved to Middletown, New Jersey when I was in middle school, and to Monmouth Boat Club to sail Lasers. I also raced on my family's Pearson 24. My first boat was a Penguin, then a Sunfish, then a Laser and then the Pearson 24. I raced competitively and traveled to regattas on all of those boats."

Elaine cites Bud Marshall as a sailing mentor and great tactician. "He really formed my early sailing years and motivated me to always learn more," she explains. "Bud had a great 'Go get 'em!' attitude."

"I started crewing on J/24s in 1994 and purchased my own J/24, *A Good Hair Day*, in 1998. *A Good Hair Day* sailed in the Garden State Parkway series, which was a great series of weekend regattas with 25 to 30 boats. The series took place at Atlantic Highlands YC, Raritan YC, Toms River YC, Ocean City YC, Metedeconk YC and Cape May YC. Last month we competed in the post-pandemic J/24 North Americans in Sayville, New York. We also plan to race *A Good Hair Day* every Wednesday evening at AHYC and then take her to a Toms River J/24 event later this summer." Pictured in last year's Ms. Race are (left to right) Elaine (helm), Kristen Gant (trimmer), Meredith Gee (tactics), Nadine Stephens (middle) and Ouida Oliver (mast).

"I joined AHYC in the early 1990s, a few years after I returned from the University of Rhode Island. AHYC has a one-design and PHRF racing program in Sandy Hook Bay. I am currently a member of the race committee, and I am the J/24 fleet captain for Fleet 128. We have a hoist for easy in/out of small race boats and a mooring field for the larger race boats. Our yacht club is run by member committees, and their great service to the club is managed by the board and club officers. I remember attending the US Sailing Summit in Chicago and learning many lessons that helped form practices we could apply to AHYC. During my tenure as Commodore (2011), we updated the galley and purchased a committee boat."

This year's Ms. Race is Saturday, August 21 (ahyc.clubex-



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press.com). The event supports 180 Turning Lives Around (180nj.org), an organization dedicated to supporting victims of domestic violence in Monmouth County. "The Ms. Race is a great event to support

competitive racing for all-women teams of all ages. Our theme this year is DARE TO MAKE WAVES. We have a very varied age group in this event, and over the years we have really built up the skill set of these teams."

"We support 180 for all they do for women in the community. During the pandemic, 180 saw an increase in women's abuse due to the lockdown and had to increase their services. The Ms. Race committee sponsors a few fundraising events including a nautical flea market, and my team donates through every Amazon purchase they make throughout the year."

"My skipper's talks provide the necessary information to make it around the course competitively and safely. We have three pre-set courses of 5.5, 6.3 and 7.5 nautical miles on Sandy Hook Bay, and allow the on-water race committee to determine the best one. I review the courses, marks, and direction around marks. Since we use pursuit starts, where each boat has their own start time based on their handicap rating, I describe how the same principles of racing apply. A pursuit start lowers your risk at the start because you are alone with clear air, but you still need to place the boat on the correct end of the line when your gun goes off, and you still need to pick the favored side of the course and sail in phase to enable your best placement in the ladder rung to the first mark – even though you cannot determine how you're doing boat-on-boat."

I then discuss local currents and tides, and trimming for boatspeed. We go through tactics and ideas for keeping your place at the finish. Many of the women appreciate the talk and it's always good to have a refresh every year.

Every Ms. Race has an abundance of enthusiastic young participants from the Atlantic Highlands Sailing Education Program. "ASHEP is a 501c3 organization for junior sailing sponsored by AHYC," Elaine explains. "Many of our racing boats have crew from the program, and many AHSEP skippers have placed in the Ms. Race. We are proud to have such a great instruction program lead to many new women skippers and crew!" ■