

## *“Roots Row” for the 40<sup>th</sup> Snow Row*

This year, it's fixed seat, traditional boats only!

March 9<sup>th</sup> of 2019 will be the 40<sup>th</sup> time rowers have lined up on the beach at Windmill Point in Hull for the famous Le Mans start and the 3 & 1/3 mile transit of the southern harbor. Four decades ago, (What were you doing forty years ago?) four boats lined up and tried the whole idea on for size. Much of the premise was that Joshua James and the surfmen of Hull did their best work in in the winter months, not the lovely zephyrs of August, and so it stood to reason that if we intended to walk in their footprints, (or their puddles) we also had to find our way out into the bay in whatever the weather gods dished up for us at that time of year to test ourselves and our boats. As the sport of open water rowing evolved, the Hull Lifesaving Museum did it's best to keep pace and included the panoply of winter athletes in the event. Some came intent on crushing the field, most came intent on joining the intrepid club of rowers who have withstood the Snow Row, many wondering mid-way through, “Whatever possessed me to do this to myself?” That internal conversation always was replaced by endorphin soaked euphoria when we finally crossed the finish line, and headed for the soup line. Medals painted on surf clams and Snow Row hats have traveled up and down the East Coast and across the Atlantic. Hull and Boston rowers frequently bump into strangers who, spotting the hats and finding out who we are, want to relive the squally day in 1982 or the famous “No Row” of 1986. Children of old Snow Rowers frequently show up to give it a try and put parent's bragging to rest. The first time a Snow Row grandchild shows I for one will have to ponder staying ashore,... no that's probably not true. Incidentally, the name in fact, is an homage to the late, great maritime historian Edward Rowe Snow, our Flying Santa.

All this being said, the question must arise, “Why are the paddlers and sliders being bumped from this year's race, and does this mean it will always be so?”. For most participants, the investment involves digging boats out of the snow, cranking in a few practices and a couple of hours on the ergometer and then loading up and heading to the beach in Hull. For the people who run the Maritime Program and the Safety Committee of the museum, the narrative is very different. We pick the date 4 months in advance, the ultimate crap shoot. We begin watching weather trends in January, gawking at wind websites in mid-February and arguing over odds of Northwest winds in the days leading up to the Saturday event. We scour Boston Harbor for anyone whose boat is still in the water to act as chase boats and create teams to walk the beach vetting boats and of course making calls on their owners. When all this is done most of us have to switch gears and hop in a boat and become an athlete for 34 minutes or so. For the last two years the aeolian gods have dished up two sobering weather systems. Last year we decided to eliminate all but the most suitable hulls out at the last minute and eschewed the Le Mans start for a rolling start on an abbreviated 2 nautical mile course in the lee of Peddocks Island. This left a not insignificant number of paddling and sliding friends high and dry and quite disgruntled after making the trip. As the one who had to hold a number of ad hoc beach conferences, I can only say the decision and the timing was fun for no one.

So there it is, fall back to deep water boats, experienced crews, skilled coxswain all with the ability to weather what the Snow Row has to offer and recognize that within the paddling and sliding community there are many with just those attributes, but the museum has chosen to focus on the founding principles and core values of the lifesavers and the early Snow Rows. So join us for a celebration of traditional boats and traditional mariners and the legacy of the lifesavers of Hull.