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Community

Peekskill will 'celebrate' again this summer

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Photo by Laura Scharf

Participants enjoy dragon boat races at last year's Peekskill Celebration.

PEEKSKILL — When Peekskill Celebration first started, it was an event that drew people in from the local area.

Now it's something that brings people in from the entire Metropolitan area.

For Cathy Montaldo, she has been involved in the event for all 14 of its years and this is the 11th year she will be in charge of it. She feels the longevity of the event has helped it grow in popularity.

"The longer you have a festival going, the more people want to come to it," Montaldo said. "I think the dragon-boat races are definitely unique. That brings people in and of course the fireworks are incredible. Unless you go to the city, which is tough for a lot of people, you are not going to see fireworks like that close up even if you did go

to the city.”

For Montaldo, it’s a lot of work to be in charge of the celebration but she does it because it’s a passion of hers.

“I love it,” Montaldo said. “I love the people that I work with. The festival is just a lot of fun. It’s just a great way to showcase the Hudson River and the City of Peekskill.”

The celebration will start with the traditional Jan Peek 10K race and two-mile walk Aug. 1. The celebration will then continue from Aug. 6-8.

On Aug. 6, the events will be held in downtown Peekskill. A kick-off concert, featuring a regional or national performer, arts and crafts show, exhibitor and food booths will highlight the night.

On Aug. 7, downtown Peekskill will have the farmers market and the Underground Railroad Tours with Peekskill High School hosting the Elton Brand Day Clinic. Brand plays for the National Basketball Association’s Philadelphia 76ers and is a two-time NBA all-star.

Running that clinic is Peekskill Head Coach Lou Panzanaro, along with a staff that includes current Red Devils and former alumni.

“It seemed like a good opportunity for Elton to come back and thank the community for all the support and love they had given him over all the years, from high school through college through the pros, and try to do something for the kids and the community,” Panzanaro said. “That’s why he wants to do it each year.”

During the day, there will be numerous events at the Riverfront Green, including the Dragon-Boat Races, which include a race for cancer awareness.

This will be the fifth year of the races and the third for the races for cancer awareness. It’s a big sport in Canada and Europe and it’s starting to become known in the United States, but there aren’t a lot of places to participate in the sport in this country, according to Montaldo.

“It’s kind of a novelty and it’s fun,” Montaldo said. “It’s easy for people to pick up. So once you’ve done it, it’s not a hard sport to learn. It’s got a real easy learning curve to it.”

Enjoying the races has been Peekskill resident Debbie Milone, who has been involved in the celebration since its first year. The first year Milone was a volunteer then she was asked to join the celebration committee.

She ran the volunteer committee for five years. She resigned from the celebration committee two years ago, after 10 years, but still volunteers her time.

Milone is a district sales manager for Yellowbook and before that was the vice president for the Guide phonebook.

“Yellowbook has participated by sponsoring and competing in the dragon boats the last couple of years,” Milone said. “I got the Guide involved from the beginning. We were a general sponsor of the event, then we sponsored the kids’ fun tent where we worked with kids doing arts and crafts. I thought the event was a great way to showcase Peekskill and it was important that the Guide be supportive of that.”

The highlight of the weekend will be the fireworks, which will be held on the evening of Aug. 7.

For those that want to get more information on the event, including volunteering your time, you can go to the events Web site at peekskillcelebration.com.

“We always need lots of volunteers,” Montaldo said. “Without them, we would never be able to get this off the ground.”

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