

City Council Regatta Seen as Step In Revitalization of Waterfront Area

By R USSELL BERMAN Special to the Sun

As the skyline of lower Manhattan held its breath in the background, lucky boat no.7 sailed to victory in the inaugural Regatta for the City Council last night on New York harbor.

But the outcome was secondary to the race, which organizers billed as a step in the revitalization of downtown that would bring more people to the harbor.

"This is part of our continuing effort to reclaim the waterfront as part of the lifeblood of the city," said Alan Gerson, the District 1 council member who spearheaded the race. "We are historically a maritime city. It's part of our roots."

A total of 60 council members, aides, and members of the Manhattan Sailing Club set sail in the regatta, with another 100 riding along in spectator boats.

The race was a year in the works, but only got off the ground in the last two weeks when the council agreed to participate, said Michael Fortenbaugh, commodore of the Manhattan Sailing Club, which co-sponsored the event.

Mr. Fortenbaugh is hoping to make the regatta an annual event that will invigorate the harbor. The waterfront has been a priority for Mr. Fortenbaugh ever since he started the Manhattan Sailing Club in 1987, before which there was hardly a sailboat to be found off the city's shores.

"The harbor's come a long way since then," Mr. Fortenbaugh said.

The regatta was held off the southwest tip of the island, near Battery Park City and adjacent to Ellis Island. With an evening start, it provided for a breathtaking scene of 15 sailboats surrounded by the city skyline and a setting sun.

For Mr. Fortenbaugh and club member Gerry Dolezar, the race organizers, the idea for a regatta was simple.

"I thought it'd be cool to get the City Council on the water," Mr. Dolezar said. "Probably a lot of people on the council have never even been on the harbor."

While no council members were on the winning squad, aides for deputy majority leader Bill Perkins and Lewis Fidler of the 46th District were among the victors on the boat, whose skipper was club member Jeremy Wurmfeld.

The regatta also served as a celebration of a youth sailing program set to launch in the fall with the help of a \$2,500 grant from the council. The program will offer free sailing lessons to teenagers and will be targeted at the economically disadvantaged. Just weeks after its announcement, the lessons have filled up, Mr. Fortenbaugh said.



ROB BENNETT POWER-SAILING City Council members, with staff and family, joined students of the Manhattan Sailing School in the City Council Regatta yesterday.