



Staten status quo



Katie Orlinsky

DECISIONS, DECISIONS: Crew of the winning sailboat in yesterday's unofficial Staten Island Decision Race cheers its victory — and what it means.



Island still N.Y.'s after race

By HASANI GITTENS

Rest assured, Staten Islanders — you're still part of New York.

The completely unofficial Staten Island Decision Race was held yesterday, with 10 sailboats representing New York and New Jersey and vying for their states' rights to Richmond County.

Luckily, The Exuberance, a 33-foot Ranger sailing out of City Island in The Bronx, won — so Staten Islanders won't have to pledge their allegiance to the Garden State anytime soon.

"This is the best crew in the Northern Hemisphere," said Exuberance captain Jeff Ohstrom, 49 — "and the Southern Hemisphere, for that matter."

Crewmate Danielle DeAngelis said after winning that she would be "queen of the island."

The Exuberance finished the nearly seven-mile course, from the North Cove Marina down to a buoy by Staten Island and back, in about 1½ hours — or a mere 10 minutes *after* the frontrunner, The America II.

That 1987 America's Cup contender was captained by Manhattan Sailing Club Commodore Michael Fortenbaugh, who came up with the idea for the race.

Because of the Performance Handicap Racing Fleet rating system, which works like a golfer's handicap, The Exuberance was given the victory because of the small boat's relative maximum speed compared to the larger America II.

The race was based on an old tale about why Staten Island belongs to New York and not New Jersey. Legend holds that

some sort of race was held around Staten Island to determine its colony of residence in the late 1600s.

Fortenbaugh, a sailor for more than 30 years, remembered the story and thought up the race when Mayor Bloomberg mentioned it in passing during a February press conference.

But Staten Island Historical Society librarian Carlotta DeFillo insists that the original race is pure fiction.

"I don't believe it is a true legend, but it is persistent," she said. "Apparently, we were never part of New Jersey. Jersey tried to claim [Staten Island] but never succeeded."

The winners of the race got a pail of soil dug up by the Coast Guard commanders of Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island.

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