

Corps of Engineers sets course for Seafair's Hydro Races



Contact: Patricia Graesser (206) 764-3760
July 25, 2002

SEATTLE—On July 29 the Army Corps of Engineers' vessel PUGET sets the race course buoys for Seafair's General Motors Cup hydroplane race.

The Corps has been setting up for Seafair's hydroplane races every year for 50 years, with volunteer scuba divers working from volunteer driven boats in concert with Corps crew members to place marker buoys for the big race.

Following is a brief article on racecourse set-up, which appeared in Corps' Seattle District internal publication.

"Setting up for SEAFAIR"

Captain Bob Kaiser slowly steers the PUGET in a broad arc, while the crew looks intently into the slate gray water of Lake Washington. They focus just beneath the surface, hoping to glimpse a buoy 35 feet below the surface. It is quite easy to see from the PUGET'S bridge27 feet above the water.

"I see it," shouts Rogelio Gonzalez. "There it is!"

The PUGET stops and in an instant Gary Joyner has a pole hooked onto the buoy line.

Waiting nearby, a motorboat moves in, and splash! Down goes the scuba diver to attach a florescent green surface buoy. He tugs the line tight and then lets it loose.

Aboard the PUGET, Bruce Teegardin swings the crane arm, with Global Positioning System antenna on top, over the buoy to confirm its location. There it floats—another course marker carefully laid out for the Seafair festival's Texaco Cup hydroplane race. It is one of more than 100 needed to make Seafair's headline event happen. Buoys also mark the flight line for the Navy's Blue Angels who plunge, roll and soar above the hundreds of thousands of race day spectators.

Each year the PUGET and survey team members work to confirm locations, reset buoys and

occasionally drop new anchors where none can be found. The PUGET is a small dual owned ship operated by the Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

All year the buoys, which mark the racecourse, flight line and spectator log boom, lurk 35 feet below Lake Washington's surface. About 10 days before race day, the PUGET and surveyors are out on the water locating buoys using satellite GPS coordinates so that volunteer scuba divers can attach the surface buoys.

Before the PUGET takes to the water, all the coordinates for the 2-mile racecourse, log boom and flyway must be checked and confirmed with the dozens involved—Coast Guard, Navy, Seafair air and water committees, and volunteer surveyors. This adds an additional accuracy and safety to the SEAFAIR experience to the general public.

Dave Campbell, with one hand on the laptop keyboard, updates captain Bob on GPS readings versus the reported buoy location. He points to a graphical layout on the screen, providing Bob with a clear visual reference.

In a matter of hours, the racecourse is set and ready to withstand the roaring rooster tails, and the Corps enjoys seeing everyone having safe and sane fun!