



Icebreaker 2020 – Unique, Wonderful, and One for the Books

By Lory Newmyer

While Covid has put the kibosh on many a fine plan this year, the pandemic was no match for two Vermont crews willing to go the extra distance to make the 2020 Icebreaker a reality. Thanks to coaches Andrew Rainville, of Mount Abraham Rowing Club and Ben Mayock, with Burlington High School, five mighty crews participated in this beloved Fall ritual – for many, a Rite of Passage -- for New England’s youth rowing community.



The Icebreaker, along with the Snow Row and Head of the Weir, is one of the Hull Lifesaving Museum’s signature races. It is distinguished by being an all-youth event, and by its fiendishly demanding format – a blend of sharp-turning slalom-style scrimmages and a grueling, end-of-day Nautical Mile across open water. The whole late-November event usually runs from about 7 am – 5 pm, and has been held in snow, sleet, and 40 mph gales. New England kids are tough.

For the past several years, the Icebreaker has included 10-15 different organizations and schools fielding about 300 kids in 40 different racing



crews. It’s a fabulously chaotic and ambitious undertaking. This year, when we invited our community to step into the ring at their own locations – on the water for those who could be together and on ergometers for those who

were social distancing – Ben and Andrew stepped into the fire. Both Burlington High School and Mount Abe Rowing Club are part of a mighty

force of youth rowers associated with the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. Through the amazing work of Nick Patch and his team, LCMM has emerged as a leader in traditional gig building, rowing, and racing.

Over the years, as the Icebreaker has evolved, HLM has shifted the race location from Chelsea Creek, to the Charlestown Navy Yard, to Hull Bay, to its current home at our Boston Rowing Center in Fort Point Channel. 2020, however, welcomed two new race venues: Vermont's Otter Creek and Burlington Harbor! Demonstrating admirable creativity and perseverance, Andrew and Ben created courses on these waters, according to HLM specs, and pulled off the near-impossible, generating camaraderie, hope, and joy in the midst of darkness.



Every kid who races in the Icebreaker earns a coveted Key to the Harbor, signifying their courage and skill behind an oar. This year's mighty crews also earned a tiny, squeaking duck. Don't you wish you had one?

Hats off to Andrew, Ben, and their crews. We love you!