

## For next year, at least, the Dad Vail is back

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The Dad Vail rowers will be back on the Schuylkill in 2010, after regatta organizers realized that problems at the proposed new site in Rumson, N.J., outweighed any benefits of going there.

The return of the country's largest intercollegiate rowing competition to Philadelphia is a public-relations win for the city, which had struggled with the perception that it failed to support one of its most cherished institutions.

But even as the city yesterday announced its victory, questions remained about how regatta officials would fill the \$250,000 funding shortfall that had prompted Dad Vail organizers to seek out sugar daddies in Rumson in the first place.

Mayor Nutter, U.S. Rep. Bob Brady, Dad Vail president Jim Hanna, and Herb Lotman, a local businessman who helped bring the world the Chicken McNugget, said at a City Hall news conference that they were confident they would find the money to keep the regatta here for several more years.



"Dad Vail 2010 will be in Philadelphia, where it belongs," Nutter said. "We never stopped working to bring the Dad Vail back, and today's announcement is a victory for the young men and women who participate in this event, for the many thousands who enjoy the spectacle, and for all Philadelphians."

Dad Vail rowers have raced on the Schuylkill for 56 years, but the regatta lost sponsors this year, casting doubt on its future here. Rumson, an enclave of wealthy financiers, had promised the Dad Vail \$250,000, so regatta officials agreed to move the event there in 2010.

But after race organizers visited Rumson in the last week, they realized the site posed challenges. They worried, for example, that they wouldn't have enough space to store boats and might have to rent it from parking lots, people close to the Dad Vail board said.

Some colleges that participated in the event complained that their costs would increase because they would have to travel.

Then, Brady (D., Pa.) and others raised questions about whether Rumson officials would come through with the \$250,000.

Hanna was circumspect about the board's exact reasons for keeping the regatta in Philadelphia.

"All voices were heard. All options were evaluated, and a decision was made in the best interest of everyone," he said.

Nutter said some corporate sponsors in Philadelphia had expressed interest, but he would not name them. He also promised that the city would work to lower the \$70,000 in overtime, cleanup, and other costs that it began charging the regatta this year. To shore up its budget, the city this year began charging organizers of all public events for costs they incur.

Nutter said he would soon pull together a team of city officials, including Parks and Recreation Commissioner Michael DiBerardinis and City Representative Melanie Johnson, to review the logistics of hosting the race, traditionally held in May, and determine less costly ways to hold it.

"We really do want to get into the nuts and bolts of the event," Nutter said.

For example, he said, the city would look at having the regatta last two days instead of three, which could save \$30,000 in city costs.

Hanna said the city had promised to upgrade course facilities and finish-line stands, provide water for the downriver launch site, and improvise restrooms.

Lotman, founder of Keystone Foods, a major supplier to McDonald's that is based in Conshohocken, said he had contacted Nutter and Hanna last week to see if he could help.

"How could you let a world-class event go out of town?" Lotman asked.

He said that in a 90-minute phone conversation with Hanna on Friday night, he had stressed the importance of keeping Dad Vail in Philadelphia.

Hanna yesterday called Lotman "the Henry Kissinger of brokering the arrangement between Dad Vail and the City of Philadelphia."