

IN PERSON

OUTSIDE THE BOX

The head of the Head of the Charles plans big splash for the 50th regatta

BY KEITH REGAN
Special to the Journal

With the organizational skills of a wedding planner and the drive of a competitive athlete, Fred Schoch might have been the perfect person to run the Head of the Charles Regatta even if he didn't grow up surrounded by rowing.

But as a third generation collegiate rower, the son of an Olympian and a coach of the sport for 15 years,

▶ CLOSER LOOK

FREDERICK SCHOCH

Title: Executive director, Head of the Charles Regatta

Age: 64

Education: Bachelor's degree, University of Washington, 1973; Master of Letters, Colorado State University, 1976

Residence: Back Bay

Schoch also brings passion to the task of growing the Regatta without losing what has made it special for 50 years. Under his leadership since 1991, the Head of the Charles has undoubtedly become more of an event for Boston and Cambridge. This year, 400,000 spectators are expected to watch over the two days as 11,000 athletes compete in more than 2,000 boats in the 50th annual version of the event.

Visitors will be greeted by an array of sponsors such as BNY Mellon and Brooks Brothers, food tents, an

interactive exhibit on the race's history and other diversions along the banks of the river – made possible, in part, with help from about 1,800 volunteers.

"It's getting more spectacular every year," said Schoch. "We just keep adding layers upon layers to the event. Our international field has just exploded because it fits into a lot of training schedules."

As the event turns 50, he added, "I think we've really come of age."

How did the HOCR begin and how has it evolved over its history? It was founded here at the Cambridge Boat Club when a couple of guys borrowed the idea from Great Britain. It's considered the grandfather of head racing in the U.S. and now there are multiple head races in the country every fall. The first year, there were 100 boats. Last year, there were more than 2,000. The growth has started to leapfrog the past 20 years. In 1997, we went to two days.



W. MARC BERNSAU

Do you know what the event means to the city in financial terms? We commission a McKinsey survey every year and it regularly shows the event brings between \$43 million and \$45 million in economic impact annually to the commonwealth. That makes us feel good every year that we are contributing in the same way the Marathon does. To the rest of the world, Boston is synonymous with rowing just as it is with running.

What details keep you up at night as the event approaches? I used to lose a lot of sleep about it and all the details. I say I'm probably the biggest wedding planner in the commonwealth. I'm throwing a big party, and every year I'd love to be able to spread out the work over four quarters. But starting mid-summer is when we really get to work on the details and the gas tank gets burned pretty quickly. We have a great volunteer group that manages the nuts and

bolts of the race and because I am in charge of the entire event, including the brand and relationships with partners, I have come to trust a lot of very talented subs to help with the details of the event and with keeping our event as professional and cutting-edge as possible. We spend six figures on tents alone and the event comes with a huge security bill, one that has increased significantly after the Marathon bombings. It's a way of life now.

Do you have anything special planned for the 50th anniversary of the event? We are having a gala dinner for 800 on Saturday night. We are going to show the movie that's been made about the event. We also have a book being written by (Boston Globe sportswriter) John Powers that will be ready next year. We're very excited about that as well.

Where does the HOCR rank in terms of annual events within the rowing community? It's held in the highest regard. I just watched our movie for the first time and the kind of excitement and reverence in which the regatta is held is very pleasing for an organizer like myself. I think it's the spirit of the event, the wanting to get it right, to have it be a great experience for the competitors, the spectators, the sponsors.

How did you come to be involved with the HOCR? I grew up in a rowing family. My father was an Olympic oarsman and rowed for the University of Washington. Later, I got the bug to coach and coached for 15 years before I got into event management. I started working in regatta management, helping George Pataki – long before he was governor – to create an event on the Hudson River. Because of that success, the Head of the Charles noticed what I had done and I guess I just had the confluence of skill sets. Not only my rowing background and event planning skills, but my background as an English teacher – I can write proposals with some fluidity and precision.

What is your idea of a perfect day? Taking a row at dawn. There is nothing better than starting the day pushing off the dock and going down into the basin and seeing the Boston skyline when the sun comes up. Then, getting back to my desk and solving problems. That's the fun. I consider myself very lucky. I say I hit the job lottery. I feel blessed to come here and be steward of this great event.

LESSONS LEARNED

What are you doing differently in your business than a year ago?



PETER RACICOT
FALLON AMBULANCE SERVICE

We implemented a third-party patient satisfaction survey and have used the responses to help re-tool our processes for a streamlined customer experience. We have deployed Narcan in all of our ambulances to help victims of drug overdoses and have trained 365 EMTs in its use and application.



MARIE PEELER
PEELER ASSOCIATES

We have increased our keynote speaking engagements. And, as part of an effort to explain more clearly to clients the full scope of coaching and leadership development services that we offer, we are working on a series of informational videos.



TAMMY TAYLOR
SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY CENTER

We have added a high-tech component to our voice therapy program, introducing the OperaVOX app. ... The app brings advanced voice quality analysis capability to the iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch and delivers professional voice analysis anywhere.