

BY BRIAN HICKS
The Post and Courier

They follow the rhumb line by day, stand in the rum line at night.

They live for offshore breezes and following seas, the pop of a spinnaker after they've cut their turn as close to the watermark as they can. And they never, ever have to see the inside of an office, unless it's attached to a marina.

It's hard to beat the life of a sailor.

That is the thinking - in fact, the attitude - behind Charleston Race Week, perhaps the Holy City's best sporting event/party of the year.

If you haven't heard of it yet, don't worry, you will. Most sailors in town for the three-day regatta say it is becoming a must-stop on the East Coast sailing race circuit.

It goes like this: Key West in January, Miami in March, and then Charleston before the long trek to Block Island off Rhode Island. Repeat.

"It fits nicely into the traveling boat circuit," said Ken King, commodore of the Charleston Ocean Racing Association. "We have a lot of boats coming from overseas and across the country. That's a huge investment."

And one that speaks well of the race.

The sailors want everyone involved - if nothing else to come to the Race Village parties at the Hilton, complete with Gosling's Rum and a band belting out Blondie and Rod Stewart on the hotel's beach club backyard. Never let it be said that sailors - guys who name their boats Sick Puppy, Spank Me and Rum At Six - don't know how to have as much fun onshore as off. Let's just say it's a good thing they stand in the Gosling's free rum line after sailing a rhumb line - a straight line between two points - instead of beforehand.

Thursday night, Junius Grimes of Asheville, N.C., dropped by the Charleston Harbor Marina just to see what all the fuss was about. Before he knew it, some of the sailors on the dock had given him a job. He spent Friday offshore aboard the Revelation, a J-105.

"I told them I could be ballast," Grimes said.

And he was. He spent much of the day hanging over the port rail to hold the boat down, and then scrambling to the starboard rail when the boat tacked.

"I got all beat up," he said. "But it was fun."

Fun is the operative word here. That's why Seabrook Island decided to become the main sponsor of the event.

"It's a fun event, and we wanted to get more involved with the community," Joe Salvo, executive director of the Seabrook Island Club, said. "And what's better than this?"

Apparently, a lot of people agree. In 10 years, the race, and the considerable onshore festivities, have grown markedly, from 30 boats to about 150 this year. These ships are from overseas, the West Coast and down the ditch in Savannah.

The race has taken on a higher profile with the involvement of the South Carolina Maritime Heritage Foundation, where Around Alone veterans Brad and Meaghan Van Liew know a little bit about sailboat races. It doesn't hurt that proceeds from the race go to help build the tallship the Spirit of South Carolina. Contributing to charity has never been so much like a Jimmy Buffett song.

Mostly, the race benefits from the things Charleston offers that sailors can't get just anywhere - good weather and a good race course.

"Charleston is just a great venue," said Billy Bremer, captain of the J-105 High Visibility. "We're from Savannah and we're jealous of this harbor."

And Charleston Race Week makes that apparent for visiting sailors and locals.

"We've got a great waterfront community, and it's good to bring it together," said Rick Hall, owner of Sea Ray of Charleston and a sponsor of the race. "And it's good to show off our city."

And that, ultimately, is also what it's all about.

If you go

Races are in Charleston Harbor and offshore all day - boats must stay back from the course.

At the Race Village behind the Charleston Harbor Hilton at Patriots Point:

Today: Cocktails At The Beach, 6:30-8 p.m.

Sunday: Chili and Beer/Awards Presentation, 4-6 p.m.

More info: The Race Village is open to the public. Daily passes today and Sunday are \$10. For more information, see www.charlestonraceweek.com or call (843) 722-1030.

Contact **Brian Hicks** at 937-5561 or bhicks@postandcourier.com
