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Sarasota Invitational to kick off Rowing Sarasota 2010 season

Nearly 500 rowers are expected at the inaugural Sarasota Invitational Rowing Regatta at 8 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 27, at Nathan Benderson Park, 2500 Honore Ave., Sarasota.

Competitors from as far away as Texas, New York and Connecticut and throughout Florida, including three hometown clubs—the Sarasota Masters, the Sarasota Scullers and the Sarasota Crew—will race on the 400-acre lake. Sprint races for middle school, high school and masters rowers will be held on a six-lane course at 1,000- and 1,500-meter distances. Medals will be awarded to first, second and third place finishers in each class. The event is sanctioned by US Rowing, the sport's national governing body.

A \$5 fee for parking will benefit the Friends of Sarasota County Parks programs and activities. Grandstands along the lake's shore will provide great views of the race course and the finish line. "Recently, Sarasota was named 'One of the Best Places in the U.S.A. to Row and Retire' and races at Nathan Benderson Lake are an important part of that," regatta chairman Jeff Koehler said. "The Sarasota Invitational will demonstrate not only the beauty of our sport, but also its appeal across generations."

Nathan Benderson Park made its debut as a rowing venue in 2009 with two regattas including the Florida State High School Championships, which drew 10,000 visitors and filled hotel rooms in the area. Nathan Benderson Park can be reached from I-75 by using exit 213, University Parkway, west to North Cattlemen Road. Upcoming events at Nathan Benderson Park include the Florida Collegiate State Championships and Florida High School State Championships in April and the US Southeast Regional Youth Championship Regatta in May.

For more information about the Sarasota Invitational, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 or visit www.rowingsarasota.com.

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