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Hub man to test trans-Atlantic rowing record, fund-raise for fellow veterans

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 23, 2012 07:46 PM

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(Courtesy: Community Rowing, Inc.)

Back Bay resident and Bay State-native Bryan Fuller, 42, (pictured in front) will join six others next month as the team attempts to become the quickest seven-person bunch to row across the Atlantic Ocean.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A Back Bay resident and board member of a Brighton-based rowing group is among a team that plans to row nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean for nearly one month as they race to try to become the fastest seven-person bunch to navigate the 2,930-mile journey from the Canary Islands off the coast of Spain to Barbados.

On Valentine's Day next month, 42-year-old Bryan Fuller will board a newly-built, first-of-its-kind, carbon-fiber-hulled boat with six other rowers as the crew embarks on a quest to beat the current seven-rover record of 32 days to complete the trans-Atlantic route, local rowing officials said.

The cast of seven will take turns in the vessel's four seated rowing positions as they steer the 34-foot-long, 6-foot-wide boat westward across the world's second largest body of water. It is a 2,550-nautical mile trip that is expected to take about four weeks, and, the crew hopes, fewer than 30 days.

"We'll be rowing day and night, basically nonstop, to beat the world record," said a statement from Fuller, who only began rowing about one year ago when he found himself unemployed and with extra spare time. But, like his teammates, has been training intensely for months.

"There is certainly some danger involved, but we're doing our best to minimize any risks," he said. "The biggest dangers are weather, container ships, heat exhaustion, and mechanical problems with the boat."

After six weeks of fund-raising with the help of volunteers, he has collected not only the \$25,000 he hoped to amass to help cover some of the costs of the endeavor, but the U.S. Army veteran has also raised several thousand dollars and continues to advocate for a rowing program for veterans at [Community Rowing, Inc.](#), according to a the Brighton-based organization.

"My goal throughout this process has been to illustrate what a veteran can do if given the chance -- and my hope is to make a big enough splash so that veterans and sponsors learn about what a terrific program this is," he said in

statement.

"Community Rowing has afforded me so many opportunities, and this row is in some small way a chance to give something back," continued Fuller, who was recently elected to the board of Community Rowing, an organization founded in 1985 by Olympic and national team rowers that today boasts more than 2,000 members and is among the largest rowing nonprofits in the country.

A certified public accountant who was deployed to Bosnia and Germany during his Army service in the 1990s, Fuller is a regular at the rowing agency's headquarters, the Harry Parker Boathouse along Nonantum Road and the Charles River in Brighton near the Boston neighborhood's boarder with Newton, organization leaders said. Of late, he has been working out four times daily, including using simulated-rowing machines and biking to build endurance.

The rowing membership there includes about 100 military veterans, ranging from 23 to 90 years in age and having served in theaters from Korea to Afghanistan, according to the nonprofit.

"It's a great group of guys, some Marines, Navy, Army," said Fuller, a Hamilton native who earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a master's degree in finance from Boston University.

He spends time rowing with those who have been injured while serving in the military, including members who participate in the Adaptive Rowing program, which officials said assists physically- and mentally-challenged veterans, including some who are training for the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.

"Bryan epitomizes the energy and spirit that we see here at Community Rowing as more and more people discover the fun and benefits," said a statement from Community Rowing director Bruce Harold Smith. "All of us are grateful for his work on behalf of the organization, and we wish him the best weather and luck as he launches what we expect will be a record-breaking trip."

His fund-raising efforts included a gala earlier this month that the organization said drew scores of supporters to the its boathouse headquarters and included a jazz band performance, silent auction, and an emcee appearance by actor

jazz band performance, silent auction, and an emcee appearance by actor David Morse, from the movie "The Hurt Locker" and TV's "St. Elsewhere."

The bulk of the \$25,000 collected through that event and others will pay for Fuller's participation in the race, officials said. The rest will help cover the cost of: building the new boat; transporting of the vessel to the starting line from a port in the Canary Islands off Spain's coast and picking it up later at the finish line at a Barbados port; electronic gear including a video camera; a specially-designed diet; clothing, including gloves, shoes, and shirts, that can withstand 100-plus degree temperatures and intense ultraviolet rays; and sunscreen.

Fuller and his rowing mates call themselves "Team Titan," and will be led by boat captain Simon Chalk, among the world's most experienced ocean rowers, the local rowing group said.

The vessel includes a high-tech computer navigational system, a satellite phone, solar panels for water desalinization, flares, a medical kit, an inflatable life raft and life preservers, officials said. The boat, made with a foam core, will be propelled by its carbon-fiber oars.

The team, which officials said includes two American rowers, two from Britain, one from Ireland, one from France and one from New Zealand, hope their efforts will raise awareness and support of returning military veterans, according to Community Rowing.

They are contestants in a competition run by Woodvale Challenge, a UK-based international organization that hosted the first Atlantic Rowing Race in 1997 when 30 teams competed.

Over five of the six odd-numbered years since - there was no race in 1999 - more than 240 rowers have completed the challenge now dubbed after its lead sponsor, the "[Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge](#)," the Woodvale Challenge website says.

Almost 20 boats have set off this trans-Atlantic rowing season, which runs annually from around the beginning of October through March, outside hurricane season, according to the local rowing nonprofit. Team Titan will be one of the last to paddle out this season.

The team's progress can be followed on [Fuller's Facebook page](#), where after the

team's Feb. 14 departure he plans to text daily with the crew's coordinates and other basic information, officials said. Contributions can be made [here](#).

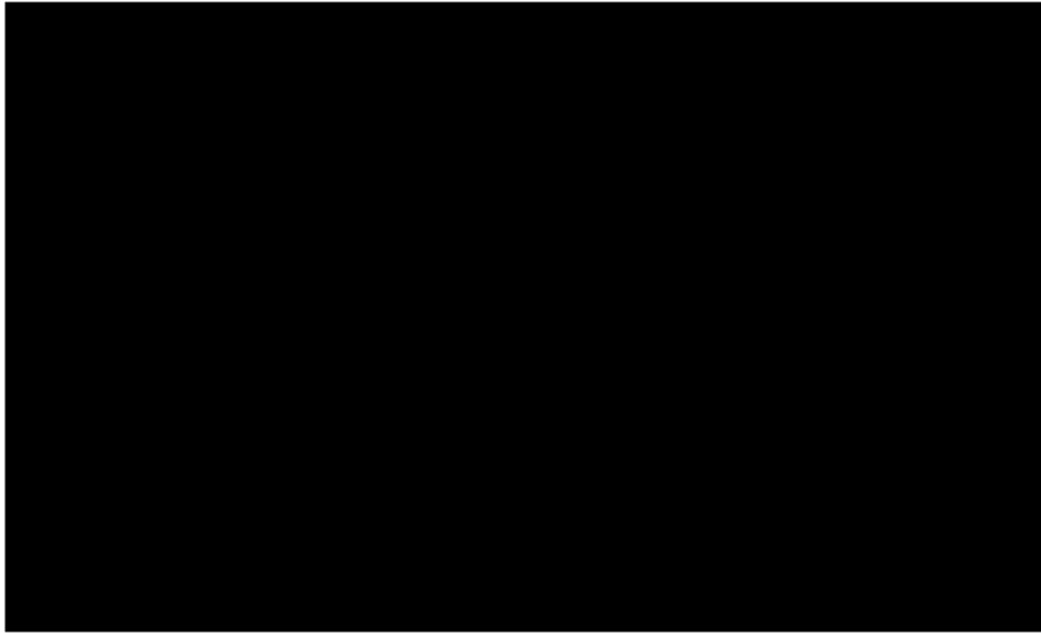
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(YouTube)

Bryan Fuller is interviewed by Christine Obusek, head of the Veteran Rowing program at Community Rowing, Inc., in Brighton.

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