

Weekend sailors to converge on Thurmond Lake for Halloween Regatta

By Steve Crawford

Staff Writer

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More than 175 sailing enthusiasts from at least 10 states will converge on Thurmond Lake this weekend for an event almost as old as the lake itself.

The Augusta Sailing Club's annual Halloween Regatta has been held at the lake since 1954, the year after the club was organized to take advantage of the new 71,000-acre reservoir.

Dan West, the sailing club's commodore, said the regatta usually attracts 110 to 140 sailing craft representing nine classes – from 30-foot scows down to 7-foot dinghies, known as OPTIs.

"OPTI means optimist," West said. The small sailboats usually are raced by junior sailors, some as young as 9 years old, he said.

"They look like a little bathtubs," he said. "It is just hilarious to watch these kids go out and do this in boats that don't look like they should sail at all."

It's not all kids' stuff, however. There will be plenty of bigger boats, too, including the large and fast E-Scow class, he said.

"They are so fast it can be scary," he said.

West said racing will begin at 12:30 p.m. today and conclude about 4 p.m., depending on the weather.

On Sunday, racing will begin at 10:30 a.m. and is expected to conclude about 1:30 p.m., followed by an awards ceremony.

West said the forecast for today looks optimal, with predictions for sunny skies and winds around 10 mph. He said winds higher than 15 mph can be tricky for the smaller, lightweight craft.

"Last year, we had 20 mph winds, and we had boats turning over all over the place," he said.

Some junior races can be observed from the shore, but to watch the bigger boats it is best to be out on the lake, he said. It is one of the larger regattas held by the club, which has 250 members and sponsors races throughout the year, West said. The club also offers sailing classes for children and adults, he said.

A lot of the races are just for fun, but this weekend's regatta will attract ranked sailors from as far away as Virginia and Missouri, West said.

"There's a fair bit of competitive spirit, I can tell you that," he said.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Augusta Sailing Club's annual Halloween Regatta

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. today, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Thurmond Lake

MORE: augustasailingclub.org