

# Pros and amateurs flock to Canton for Rushton Memorial Canoe Races

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Competitors in the Joe Randi Rushton Relay make a turn around a buoy and head back to Taylor Park Beach on Saturday.



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C-1 Pro Men racers react after crossing the finish line Saturday at Taylor Park in Canton.



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C-1 Pro racer Frances Trudel, left, is greeted by family and friends after crossing the finish line.



CHRISTOPHER LENNEY/WATERTOWN DAILY TIMES  
C-1 Pro Women talk after crossing the canoe race finish line Saturday at Taylor Park in Canton.



CHRISTOPHER LENNEY/WATERTOWN DAILY TIMES  
Bill Short carries his home-made wooden touring kayak across Taylor Park beach in Canton on Saturday.





CHRISTOPHER LENNEY/WATERTOWN DAILY TIMES  
Fans and competitors gather on the Taylor Park Beach on Saturday after the Joe Randi Rushton Relay.

CANTON — Frances Trudel traveled from Canada to spend his 30th birthday paddling his canoe for more than two hours in the Grasse River on Saturday.

Mr. Trudel, a professional canoe racer from Shawinigan, Quebec, said competing in the 58th annual Rushton Memorial race was a fun way to spend his milestone birthday.

“This is my first race in the U.S.,” he said. “It’s a big race and good practice for Cooperstown at the end of the month.”

Mr. Trudel’s wife, Emilie LaPointe, and their two young children, stood along the riverbank at Taylor Park Beach, cheering him on as he finished the 14-mile race in a solo canoe.

Mr. Trudel said he tipped out of his canoe during the race, partly because the water level was fairly high, and also because it was his first experience on the Grasse River. The mishap didn’t dampen his love of canoeing.

“I like to be free on the water and pushing myself in nature. It’s a unique feeling,” he said. “There’s a lot of strategy to racing.”

Despite overcast skies and low temperatures, turnout was fairly strong for Saturday’s events which included a mix of professional and recreational races. Music, a chicken barbecue and an awards ceremony added to the festivities. All participants received a T-shirt.

Children kept busy on the playground and climbing up a pile of sand on the beach.

A few more races are scheduled for today starting at 10 a.m. including the tandem professional and tandem amateur races. The weekend events conclude with a 12:45 p.m. awards ceremony.

Gene Newman, race director, said the annual canoe weekend draws a strong field of professional canoers from both Canada and the U.S. because it's early in the season and gives competitors an idea how they're matching up.

"It's the first big race of the year and they enjoy the quality of the competition," Mr. Newman said. A Canton native, he said he's proud that the Rushton Memorial races have endured for nearly six decades. The race is named for Henry Rushton, a prominent 19th-century canoe builder from Canton.

"Rushton was a significant part of our Canton history and the race itself is now part of our history . I'm kind of honored to be heading this up," Mr. Newman said. "If I wasn't race director, I'd be out there paddling."

Like Henry Rushton, Mr. Newman builds canoes, mostly out of carbon fiber. He and his brother, John Newman, operate GRB Newman Designs, a shop on Route 68. They've taken orders from England, Germany and other countries.

Rebecca Davis and her husband, Mike, traveled from their home in Homer, Mich., for the race. Mrs. Davis captured first place in the C-1 women's division, with a time of 2:20:27, while Mr. Davis, finished first in the C-1 men's category, finishing in 2:06:15.

Mrs. Davis said the couple travel to many states competing in races, including Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, New York and Tennessee.

"It's our vacation and it's our hobby," the 29-year-old said.

Binoculars in hand, Caroline Rushforth was working as a volunteer, watching out for race numbers as canoeists approached the finish, and relaying information to the timekeepers.

"It's a wonderful event and it draws people to our community from all over North America," she said.