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What's in a name? Just ask these Dad Vail rowers



Cleveland rowers head for the Strawberry Mansion bridge in their boat, "Who's Yo' Daddy," during a women's varsity heavyweight eight heat. MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Staff Photographer



GALLERY: Cleveland rowers head for the Strawberry Mansion bridge...

By Phil Anastasia, Inquirer Columnist

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You can't pronounce the name of Patrick DelBarba's boat and you definitely don't want to type it into your computer.

"It's a 13-character virus," DelBarba, a junior at Case Western Reserve University, said of the symbols painted on the side of his single, which was sitting in its slings Friday at the 76th annual Dad Vail regatta.

Most boats recall their benefactor, which makes sense. If you're going to cut a check for one of those sleek, shiny jobs - the biggest and best of which can run as much as \$45,000 - you ought to get your name on the side.

That's why most boat names read like the list of contributors near the top of the page of some program: "The Anderson Family" and "John and Mary Lynch" and "Dr. Harry Speakman."

But there were all kinds of unusual names of boats in Dad Vail's rower's village, which sprawled along the banks of the Schuylkill on a warm and overcast first day of racing at the largest intercollegiate rowing event in North America.

Georgia Tech has an eight called "Typhoon Linda." Like all unusual boat names, there's a story behind that.

"We had a benefactor who was a Marine and his wife was named Linda," said Georgia Tech men's coach Rob Canavan, a former rower at Temple. "She had a typhoon-like personality. So that's what he wanted us to name it."

Penn State has a boat called "Steak and Eggs," while Army has one known as "The Polar Express."

There was a "Firefly" and "Fury" and "Harmony" and "Blaze."

There was a "Man O' War" and "Phoenix" and "Glory Days."

One boat spoke of its crew's ability to rally to victory: "Hostile Takeover."

Another reflected the synchronicity of its crew: "Four Part Harmony."

Lehigh has a boat named "Gregarious Gertrude" and another called "The Bus," the latter bought with donations from alumni who wanted to take a good-natured poke at their old coach.

The story goes that during one particular slow row, the crew was chastised by the coach for moseying down the river like they were riding in a "bleeping bus."

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So when those guys graduated and made a few bucks, they gave enough back to the program to buy a new eight but with one stipulation: The boat must be called "The Bus."

The College of New Jersey kept things kindergarten-simple in naming one of its rides: "Ro-Ro-JR-Boat."

George Mason has an eight named "Sir Ernest Shackleton" for the polar explorer whose exploits with the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition from 1914-17 are the stuff of legend.

"He was an awesome leader," said George Mason coach Bob Spousta, who named the boat. "He didn't know the meaning of the word 'quit.'"

The boat is 14 years old. Rather than buy a new one, the team opted to refurbish their old favorite last year.

"The guys took a ride in a new boat and they said, 'It feels like a shiny Shackleton,'" Spousta said. "So we decided to shine up Shackleton."

DelBarba, who posted the fastest time of the day in the heats of the men's open singles (seven minutes, 15.76 seconds) to advance to Saturday's semifinals, bought his boat used and named it after a devious program that destroys software.

The boat's nickname is "Forkbomb," which is a pretty good description of the virus' actions in cyberspace.

"I thought it made for a pretty funny boat name," DelBarba said of the symbols that start out as a frown-y face and get angrier from there.

It's a bright white boat. But it was the only one in the village that should have come with fine print: "Don't Try This At Home."

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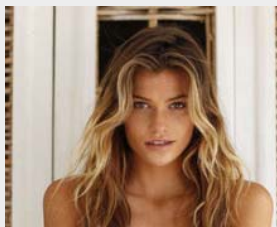
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