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# Fayetteville Duck Derby will be part of Dogwood Festival this year

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Staff file photo

Posted: Friday, February 6, 2015 5:00 pm

By Chick Jacobs Staff writer

It's a little thing, a touch of blue amid an armada of yellow.

But it bothers Johnny Wilson.

"In the history of the Duck Derby, the winner has never been on hand to enjoy their victory," said Wilson, the director of Fayetteville Urban Ministry. The nonprofit group organizes the one-day cascade of color on the Cape Fear River, bringing joy to those watching tens of thousands of little yellow ducks bob down the muddy river.

Every year, one of the ducks has made someone very happy. But every year, that winner has found out over the phone.

"They're always very excited," Wilson said. "But can you imagine how much more exciting it would be to actually see your duck win?"

With that in mind, Wilson and his yellow navy will unveil a few new rules at next week's Very Important Duck (VID) Party on Thursday, beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the Cape Fear Botanical Garden. Don't fret: you can still win, even if you aren't there to coax your quacker to victory.

But if the winner is around, there's a \$150 bonus waiting. In addition, the fifth annual Duck Derby will be, for the first time, part of the annual Dogwood Festival.

"It's good for us, and good for them," Wilson said. "And it will really give the ducks a reason to go all out."

In addition, rather than being dumped over the side of the Person Street Bridge into the Cape Fear River, the ducks will be corralled and released into Festival Creek. The horde will then bob and weave its way through Festival Park on the closing day of the festival.

"Can you imagine all the folks lining the creek cheering their duck to victory?" Wilson asked. "I bet it will get the

ducks all pumped to do their best."

It would ... if the ducks weren't already pumped. Each of the 10,000-plus baseball-sized critters is a buoyant blob of molded plastic, each with a unique identifying number taped to its tummy. Each duck in the race has been "adopted" by someone who paid the duck's entry fee of \$5.

After a quarter-mile cruise through the park, the first duck to cross the finish line will win someone a 22-foot travel trailer donated by Camping World.

Other prizes this year include a 65-inch flat-screen TV, a set of tires, cash and a spa membership.

This year, even the last duck across the line will win.

"The last-place 'winner' will receive a camping tent and a jar of molasses," Wilson said. "That way, they'll have somewhere to wait the next time."

In case you were wondering, the ducks don't hang around after the contest. The birds are national competitors.

"They don't fly south; they just hop into a truck and take off for the next derby," Wilson said. "They're owned by a national gaming company, and they stay busy.

"When we started this, we thought about getting our own ducks and saving some money. But then we started thinking about how to get them, where to store them, how to make sure people knew the competition was on the up-and-up. In the end, we decided to let someone else corral the ducks."

Either way, the nonprofit is able to use the proceeds to help hundreds of people in the Cape Fear region. The Fayetteville Duck Derby raises money to support more than two dozen nonprofit organizations and schools in Cumberland County. Each year, the derby has raised about \$50,000, which is funneled into community projects.

And this year, Wilson hopes, the duck's sponsor will be on hand to savor the victory.

"We sweetened the pot a little this year," he said. "I think the winner will be there. I feel lucky."

Staff writer Chick Jacobs can be reached at [jacobsc@fayobserver.com](mailto:jacobsc@fayobserver.com) or 486-3515.

### Fifth annual Duck Derby

When: April 26, during the Dogwood Festival

Where: Festival Park

What: More than 10,000 yellow ducks will float through the park. The first five ducks will win a prize, as will the last-place duck.

Cost: There's no charge to watch. Entry fee is \$5 per duck, with multiple-duck discounts available.

Information: Click on [fayettevilleduckderby.com](http://fayettevilleduckderby.com) or call 483-5944

Note: Ducks will be available after the ticket-only Very Important Duck party (VID) at the Cape Fear Botanical Garden on Thursday.

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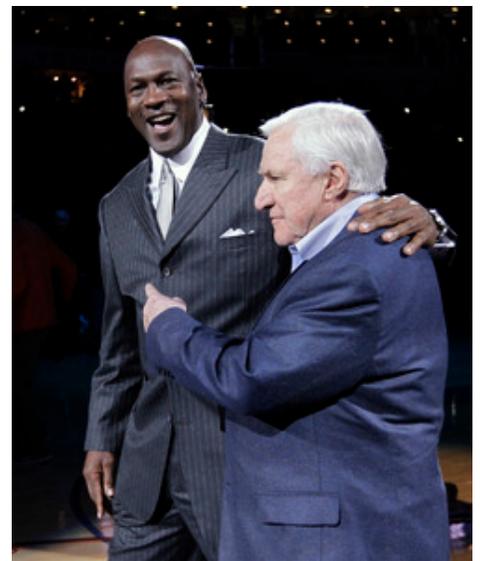


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