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Rubber ducks to race the waters for second annual fundraiser

By Hilary Snow (<http://portcitydaily.com/author/hilary/>) on May 19, 2016

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Thousands of iconic bathtub toys will fill Jungle Rapids' Lazy River Friday for the second annual Coastal Duck Derby. Courtesy photo.

When a sea of rubber ducks came splashing down into Jungle Rapids' Lazy River last year, the sound was, in a word, thunderous.

“We all looked up at the sky, and it was a perfectly nice night,” said Jamie Thompson, development director for Coastal Horizons. “We finally realized it was the ducks.”

The roar of thousands of bright yellow bathtub buddies will return to Jungle Rapids Friday night for the second annual Coastal Duck Derby, a fundraiser to benefit Coastal Horizons' Open House, the

county's only emergency shelter for abused, neglected and at-risk youth who need a temporary, safe place to live.

After witnessing the derby for the first time in 2015, Thompson can say the rush of 10,000 rubber ducks through the Volcano – a massive suspended waterslide that spins riders round and round – and down into a pool is quite a sight to behold, and not one you'll soon forget.

And that memorable experience is fitting, since the duck derby's purpose is not only to raise money for Open House but also to raise awareness about the shelter's efforts to combat an issue many don't encounter in their daily lives.

“Coastal Horizons staff and Open House staff do amazing work. Their work is hard but it makes a difference. But they do work quietly; we have to protect the people who come to us,” Thompson said. “But we also want people to begin to understand Open House and what we do because it's something you might not know exists if you have never needed to come.”

In operation for four decades, Open House is one component of Coastal Horizons, which also provides substance abuse and mental health services and runs a rape crisis center. The nine-bed shelter gives children and youth 6 to 19 a refuge from abuse, family crisis and homelessness. While there, they receive the basic needs like food and clothing, but Open House also helps kids on a path to success through counseling, tutoring, vocational and life-skills programs and recreational activities.

Since all of that is provided at no cost, public support is crucial to keep the programs going, Thompson said, noting many youth come to Open House with nothing more than a bag of belongings and clothes.

The derby, a rousing success in its first year, is a major source of that support. It's a fundraiser, Thompson said, that is accessible to most of the community, since it costs as little as \$5 to participate.

Ducks are “adopted” ahead of the race for \$5 each. A “Quack Pack” of six ducks is \$25, and larger packages – “Quacker's Dozen” (12) for \$50, “Flock of Ducks” (25) for \$100 and “Duck Invasion” (130)

for \$500 – are available. They can be bought online (<http://www.duckrace.com/wilmington>), at Jungle Rapids, 5320 Oleander Drive, or Roberts Market in Wrightsville Beach.

Volunteers were busy this week tagging ducks with corresponding codes to match buyers with their tiny racers. Then, a team will load them into the Volcano Thursday night ahead of the big reveal.

Last year, Open House far exceeded its goal of selling 5,000 ducks and Thompson said the goal this time around is 10,000.

In all, about 15,000 quackers – both tagged and unclaimed – will plummet at 6:30 p.m. Friday into the Lazy River, where they'll float along to the finish line.

The fastest bird will earn its owner \$1,000 and other top ducks will take home prizes like \$500 in cash, a Farmin' gift basket worth \$250, a weekend stay at Oglethorpe Lodge in Savannah, Georgia, a gift card package and season passes to Jungle Rapids.

The stakes are even higher this year with a chance to win \$100,000. Spirit Communications has committed to give that hefty payday to both the adopter and Open House should one of 13 specially tagged ducks come in 13th place.

While you do not have to be present to win, Thompson said it's definitely worth checking out, even if you haven't bought a duck.

"It's really heartwarming to watch, and to see all these people with their families coming together for something that helps Open House," she said.

Ahead of the race, there will be music, children's games and some food and refreshments from Jungle Rapids and Farmin' beginning at 5 p.m.

More information about Coastal Duck Derby, including a video of the racers in action, is on the event's Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/CoastalDuckDerby/>) page.

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The south end of Wrightsville Beach has a new cafe just in time for the summer season. Sundays Cafe opened last month above South End Surf Shop on South Lumina Avenue. Find out what sets it apart from its predecessor in that space.



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Wilmington City Council members appropriated over \$228,000 in federal forfeiture funds for the purchase of equipment for the Wilmington Police Department's new Real Time Crime Center, which will help provide responding officers with the latest information - including surveillance video - from the field.

