



## Conch Republic Cup / Key West Cuba Race Week

### *More Than Just a Race to Cuba*

KEY WEST, FLA. (July 25, 2016) – When diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba were restored in 2015, the [Conch Republic Cup](#) was resurrected after a forced 13-year hiatus. From Tuesday, January 24 through Friday, February 3, 2017 the storied event, also known as Key West Cuba Race Week, is scheduled for its ninth edition, or if counting backward, its second consecutive running since U.S travel restrictions to Cuba were lifted. Designed as a full immersion, round-trip racing excursion from Key West to Cuba, the Conch Republic Cup is open to PHRF, cruising and racing monohulls and schooners with a minimum length of 26 feet as well as multihulls with a minimum length of 24 feet.

"The Conch Republic Cup is the only race with more than one stop that runs along the coast of Cuba," said Conch Republic Cup Executive Director Karen Angle. "It is not just a race to Cuba; it is a series of races that includes a return race to Key West."



The Conch Republic was resurrected in 2015  
(photo credit: Priscilla Parker) [Click photo to download in high resolution](#)

Co-hosted by Key West Community Sailing Center (KWCS) and Hemingway International Yacht Club (HIYC) of Cuba, the Conch Republic Cup kicks off in Key West with two days of welcoming festivities. "Distance Race 1" is from Key West to Varadero, Cuba where sailors will enjoy a welcome reception

at Marina Gaviota before starting out the next morning, Thursday, January 26, on “Distance Race 2” from Varadero to Havana, Cuba. After a lay day in Havana, the “Castillo Del Morro Triangle Race” will take place on Sunday, January 29, calling for a different skill set to navigate a coastal course of between four and ten miles around a combination of fixed marks and/or dropped marks. The day also includes a parade along the Malecon seaside walk where the Cuban people will welcome racers and an Awards Party at HIYC. After three days off to enjoy the island and socialize, competitors return home by way of “Distance Race 3” on Thursday, February 2.



Canals and entrance: Marina Hemingway of Havana, Cuba. [Click photo to download in high resolution](#)

“In 2016, 60 boats and 435 sailors, hailing from more than 25 states and five countries, participated in the Conch Republic Cup, making it the largest crossing to date,” said Peter Goldsmith, who started the race in 1997 with his partner, the late Michelle Geslin, and members of the Key West Sailing Center where he was Fleet Captain. It was a direct race to Varadero, since KWSC had already run two races to Varadero in the 1970s. It remained that way until 1999 when the format was expanded to include the leg from Veradero to Havana, creating the traditional triangle of the Conch Republic Cup. Buoy racing was added in 2016, making it a four-race series.

### **A Colorful Past**

Although travel restrictions to Cuba are now lifted and allow American sailors once again to legally race to Cuba, the U.S. government didn’t always look so kindly upon the Conch Republic Cup or its founders.

“Diplomatic relations had been severed since 1961 and the embargo was still in full force. So after 7 years of unsanctioned races, in 2003 the government had had enough,” said Peter Goldsmith. According to Goldsmith, U.S. agents attended the skippers’ meeting in Key West with guns on their hips and made a speech about why the participants could not go to Cuba. “By then, we were used to going anyway, and no one was going to take away our right to travel. On the way to the start, we were escorted out of the harbor by several government boats and a helicopter, which was taking our pictures.”



CRC Founder Peter Goldsmith and his partner, the late Michelle Geslin, were arrested in 2003 for “trading with the enemy” (photo courtesy Peter Goldsmith); Castillo Del Morro is a famous landmark in Havana. (photo credit: Priscilla Parker)

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The government boats did not stop the fleet, but for the first time in the seven-year history of the race, officials boarded most of the boats upon their return from Cuba and confiscated cameras, GPS systems, and charts. A Grand Jury was convened in Key West and competitors were subpoenaed to testify. Both Goldsmith and his partner, Michelle Geslin, were indicted, arrested and charged with “trading with the enemy.” They were freed after 1 ½ hours. A year and a half later, when they were summoned to court at the Federal Courthouse in Miami, the case was tabled, giving the government three years to present a better case, which never happened.

“It’s wonderful to have the race series going again with the blessing of both governments,” said Goldsmith. “The Conch Republic Cup’s mission is to introduce as many as possible in the U.S. sailing community to Cuba as well as revitalize racing in Cuba, facilitating a cultural exchange through sport.”

Entries for the Conch Republic Cup are limited. Early registration deadline is September 15, 2016; regular registration deadline is December 15, 2016. For more information, including the newly posted Notice of Race and full schedule, visit [www.conchrepubliccup.org](http://www.conchrepubliccup.org) or email [Karen@conchrepubliccup.org](mailto:Karen@conchrepubliccup.org).

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