



Race to Mackinac Becomes True Spectator Sport via Web during 2005 Event

Longest and oldest annual freshwater sailboat race brings technology to forefront.

New race transponder changing the sport makes its debut at 2005 Mac Race.

CHICAGO (June 2, 2005) – Chicago Yacht Club’s Race to Mackinac (beginning July 16) will debut the new FlagShip transponder on up to 75 boats, enabling spectators to track racers’ hourly progress via the Web.

FlagShip Integration Services Inc., an IT consulting firm and major sponsor of the Race to Mackinac for the fifth consecutive year, actually custom built the new, smaller and more robust transponder to enable many more features and two-way communications. FlagShip will be responsible for all transponders and race tracking during the 2005 competition.

Kim Flagstad, owner of FlagShip since 1985, is a Chicago Yacht Club (the Club) member and boat captain competing in her ninth consecutive Mac Race. In 2003, her boat, Ozymandias IV, came in first in section six of the Mac Race.

Overall, the FlagShip transponder provides better competitive tracking during the race and turns it – and sailing, in general – into more of an exciting spectator sport, like NASCAR or horse racing.

Most people don’t realize that at seven miles a boat can no longer be seen, as it falls below the horizon. Before the use of effective transponders, the 333-mile Mac Race was only a spectator sport for people seeing the boats off and watching them arrive at the end of the race on Mackinac Island.

“We see the FlagShip transponders helping to take our world-class sporting event to the next level and change the way competitive sailing is viewed and experienced,” explained Rick Lillie, the Mac Race chairman. “The only way to truly make sailing a spectator sport is to provide ongoing tracking and several snapshots of the competitors’ progress – much like a marathon with staging points.”

Last year, 55 boats used transponders built by SASCO. These transponders and many other types are bulky, can only transmit and not receive data, and must be powered by the boat’s own power. This year, Mac Race captains voluntarily signed up to be among the 75 boats to pilot test the new FlagShip transponders.

FlagShip and the Club hope to make the new transponder available to all Mac Race sailboats in the near future. Many in the sailing community expect the FlagShip transponder to be utilized by several other sailing clubs in future races.

What’s unique about the FlagShip transponder?:

- Size: It’s very small, measuring only 9.5" x 6.5" x 3.5" – similar to the size of thin box of facial tissues and less than half the size of most other transponders. It’s completely self contained and water tight.

- Power: It operates on its own rechargeable, self-contained battery – other transponders depend on and are connected to a boat’s power supply. The battery could last up to 10 days, depending on the number of transmissions.
- Communications:
 - Provides two-way communications;
 - Transmits location, speed and heading every hour (twice as often as last year);
 - Reports critical passages at the 45th parallel, Grey’s Reef and the Mackinac Bridge; and,
 - Contains built-in GPS.

In addition to other sailors and the sailors’ families and friends, *anyone* can go online and track the progress of racers using transponders during the Mac Race at <http://chicagoyachtclub.org/racetomackinac/>.

“We’re excited that the Mac Race will be the FlagShip transponder’s debut,” Kim Flagstad said. “Our transponder will improve the sport for participants and make it much more accessible to everyone on the shoreline, in their apartments or even at a coffee shop tracking the race. We expect sailboat races around the world to be using our new transponders within a year or two.”

In future races, the FlagShip transponder will provide sailors customized weather reports focused on their race, e-mail while on shore and other incoming and two-way communications capabilities.

FlagShip will also provide stand-alone Internet kiosks sailors can utilize before the race to check their email, print out the latest race information and find out the local weather patterns in Chicago and through the race route on Lake Michigan.

Speaking about the impact the transponders will have, Jim Hill, crew chief on Ozymandias IV, said: “My folks and friends 3,720 miles away in Aberdeen, Scotland will be cheering me on from their computers as they follow our boat’s progress against the other 75 boats with transponders.”

ABOUT FLAGSHIP:

FlagShip Integration Services helps businesses and their technology run smoothly. FlagShip functions as a virtual, full-service, in-house, out-sourced IT department for regional, national and global organizations ranging from non-profits to publicly traded companies. Since its early beginnings in 1985, FlagShip has combined the smart use of emerging technologies with best business practices to produce high-integrity, integrated solutions.

FlagShip prides itself on the following key differentiators: 1) providing clients Co-Created Value™ where clients have around-the-clock support with fixed-rate billing; and 2) beginning engagements by thoroughly understanding a client’s business structure and all aspects of its IT operation, and then assessing how technology fits into the bigger picture.

FlagShip is a privately held, female-owned company with headquarters in Palatine, Ill.

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