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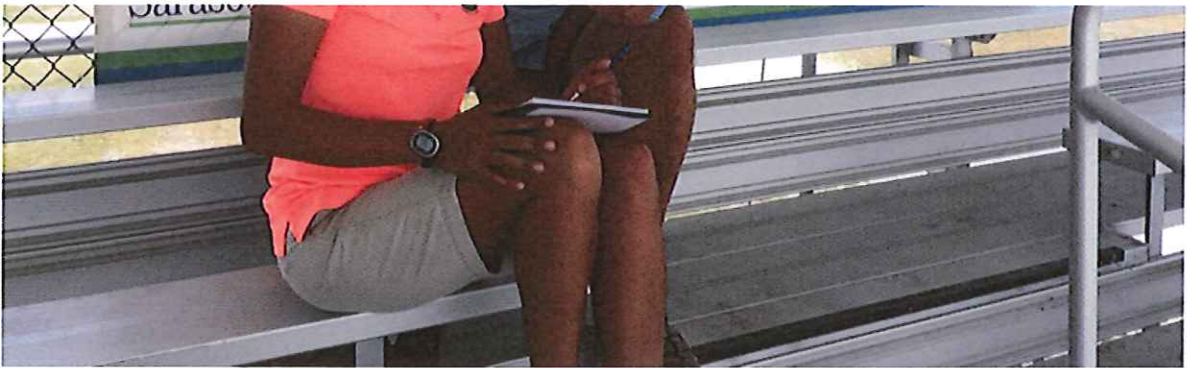
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Event action keeps rolling at Nathan Benderson Park.

by: **Jen Blanco** | Sports Editor

It has been 20 consecutive weekends that Nathan Benderson Park has hosted an event.

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Included have been 5K runs, collegiate team rowing events and numerous other regattas.

Nathan Benderson Park has hosted the U.S. Olympic Team Trials, the Sunshine State Conference Regatta, the Florida Scholastic Rowing Association Sweep Championships and the Modern Pentathlon, all in a span of 17 days.

On May 14-15, the park hosted more than 1,300 high school rowers for the USRowing Southeast Youth Championships.

So how does a 600-acre community park flawlessly transition from one event to the next, practically overnight?

That's where Sarah Kupiec, the Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Associates event and volunteer manager, and her dedicated staff, come into play.

Kupiec has a lot to do since the park plans to host roughly 46 events during the 2016 fiscal year, which began in October and runs through Sept. 1. Every year, the park sets goals for how many events it will host and Kupiec and her team are responsible for making sure each event goes off without a hitch.

Prior to the start of the Modern Pentathlon, I sat down with Kupiec to see what goes into preparing the park on a weekly basis.

I didn't even need to speak to her to get answers. Waiting for an interview, I observed what could best be described as organized chaos, Kupiec fielded phone calls, coordinated the relocation of tables and chairs, met with DJs and local vendors and organized volunteers, in just the short time I was waiting to speak with her.

She then turned her attention to an extensive checklist that included items such as the timing of the National Anthem. Kupiec also has smart sheets, site plans and sign-up geniuses that are altered for each event.

"We're always thinking ahead," Kupiec said.

The size, type and caliber of events play a part in determining how much time and physical assistance will be allotted at any given time. Although every event, no matter the size or scope, is awarded the same level of attention when it comes to detail.

"You're only as good as your last event," said former SANCA CEO Paul Blackketter. "We're always striving to make our next event better than our last event. Even though there's a lot of transition, we still want to keep that level of detail the same."

Kupiec has been fortunate to have the assistance of a dedicated staff, including Blackketter, who stepped down as SANCA's president and CEO on April 28.

And none of it could be accomplished without volunteers.

"If it weren't for the volunteers, the events would not be successful," Kupiec said. "They see the goal of the park and our mission, and they just come together and help. I can't say enough about the volunteers. Those

are really the people who make it happen.”

Continuous action at Nathan Benderson Park will continue until June 4 when Kupiec and her staff will enjoy the first quiet weekend at the park in six months.

With the Sunshine State Games slated for the following weekend, Kupiec’s feet won’t be up for long.



The Author: Jen Blanco

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