

Racing Around in the Yard

By Lana Bortolot

A popular underground cycling event, the Red Hook Criterium, soon will find an unexpected collaborator in the Brooklyn Navy Yard when the two join up to present high-speed nighttime racing.

It will also test the Navy Yard's ability to become a more public partner in the neighborhood, a desire long expressed by Andrew H. Kimball, president and chief executive of the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corp.

Held in Red Hook since its founding six years ago, the unusual nighttime race, which is sanctioned only by its fervent followers, will move to the Navy Yard for the first time on June 8. The Brooklyn event has expanded internationally in recent years, with racing rounds also held in Milan, Italy, and Barcelona, Spain.

"The race represents our commitment to working with community partners...and creating unique opportunities to access the yard," Mr. Kimball said.

While the Navy Yard seeks to reveal more of itself to the community, the race backers are also seeking more visibility.

"We want to be mainstream in the sense that we want everyone to come out and enjoy the race," said David August Trimble, the race's founder. "But we're also writing our own rules and setting up the race exactly how we want it. We're not against any of the cultures; we're basically trying to create our own."

He added, "I'd always dreamed of doing a race in there....I still can't believe they're letting me do it."

Mr. Trimble has seen the event, which now includes a 5K foot race—also at night—grow from 20 spectators and 25 entrants in 2008 to 10,000 attend-



ees and 600 cyclists and runners competing most recently in March at the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal in Red Hook. Sponsorship support has increased, too, and this year includes Rockstar Games as well as Citi Bike, New York City's bike-sharing program scheduled to launch on Monday.

Known as "the Crit" to its followers, the event consists of 26 laps around a 1.2-kilometer track winding through the 300-acre industrial park and centered around the new green manufacturing center. The attention that the race has garnered—at a time when urban cycling is the talk of the town—was a factor that helped convince the Navy Yard to host the race.

"It helped that he's done this successfully in Red Hook and overseas: We didn't want to be the guinea pig," said Navy Yard

spokeswoman Aisha Glover. "It was great for us to know he has great success, experience and a following."

She added, "We are looking at it as a community event because it's the cleanest, easiest way for us to get 2,000 people here and have a better understanding of what we do."

While attracting an increasing number of businesses and tour visitors, the Navy Yard has mostly been sealed off to the public. In November 2011, it opened an exhibition and visitors center in Building 92, a commandant's former residence, after a \$25.5 million restoration. The visitor's center hosts exhibitions, educational programming and monthly tours, and includes an employment center. Last year, 43,530 people visited the site, and 250 people—more than dou-



Bikers during the most recent Red Hook Criterium race held at the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal on March 30.

ble the amount the year before—were placed through the employment center.

"Building 92 essentially is our community connection," Ms. Glover said. "There are people who pass by every day and have

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no idea what's going on in here. We want people to have some context of the yard so it's not an in-and-out experience."

For the June 8 race, Building 92 will serve as headquarters for the some 700 athletes expected to enter the foot and bike races. During the day, it will be open for

exhibition and serve as the starting place for a two-hour bike tour of the Navy Yard.

Mr. Trimble and other Navy Yard representatives plan to meet with officials from the Business Improvement Districts in Fort Greene and Dumbo to discuss ways in which the event can engage local merchants. So far, six locally run food trucks are slated to be on the site for the race, and Mr. Trimble hopes attendees will take the party to the streets.

"In Red Hook, every bar and restaurant was packed after the race," Mr. Trimble said. "We're trying to figure out which businesses stay open later, and we'll be trying to promote local businesses as much as possible and drive traffic into their areas before and after the event."

Michael Blaise Backer, executive director of the Myrtle Ave-

nue Brooklyn Partnership, said the event has potential to drive people out from under the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, which separates Fort Greene from the Wallabout, and onto the revitalized Myrtle Avenue, which has a vibrant restaurant row.

"I think it's an experiment for the Navy Yard as well," he said. "We look to the Navy Yard more for its economic development potential—and I still think that's where it continues to serve as a neighborhood anchor and a leader—but this kind of thing is a creative and unique approach that does help the community and businesses outside the yard."

Said Ms. Glover, "We want to find different ways to connect to the community and [the race] is a great way to do that. "We're hoping this will lift the veil a little bit."

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