

Inner Harbor races promise boatload of fun

Sleek, canoe-like boats adorned with intricately carved dragon heads and tails will slice through the waters of the Inner Harbor in a spectacle dating to ancient China.

The Catholic Charities Dragon Boat Races on Sept. 13 will feature 33 teams whose members have paddled through nine weeks of practice.

About 10,000 spectators are expected to turn out for the races, which raise funds for Catholic Charities.

A testament to the appeal of the biennial dragon boat races, 17 teams have competed since their inception in 1998, and countless spectators keep coming back.

"I think that we hit a mark for everyone, and that's why we have so many involved," said Natalia Ramirez, director of special events for Catholic Charities.

"A lot of these teams just love the fact that they have an opportunity to give back to the community," she said. "It starts from a place of compassion, and I think it just branches out from there."

The benefits, Ms. Ramirez said, extend well beyond the \$500,000 the event is expected to raise by building bridges between Catholic Charities, organizations and spectators.

Each team is partnered with a Catholic Charities program, and Ms. Ramirez said that many team members continue volunteering for the programs after the races.

The event not only provides all-day entertainment on the water, where 22 team members fill each boat, but also at Rash Field and along the Inner Harbor promenade, where team members compete for prizes like best drummer's hat, best-decorated team tent and best chant.

Baltimore sportscaster Scott Garceau will serve as master of ceremonies.

Harold A. Smith, executive director of Catholic Charities, came up with the idea for the fundraiser seeing dragon boat races in Hong Kong.

It seemed fitting, he said, that Catholic Charities would have its major fundraiser at the Inner Harbor, as the agency got its start 85 years ago by protecting immigrant children who had been abandoned along the Baltimore waterfront.

Races begin at 8 a.m. and continue until approximately 4 p.m. Admission is free. For more information, telephone 410-547-5473.