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## ***PVSC Sponsors First-Ever Novice Regatta on Passaic River***

**Kearny, NJ** – For the first time ever, the Passaic River will be the site of a Novice Regatta for young high school crew competitors, thanks to the work and sponsorship of the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commissioners' River Restoration Program.

The regatta, featuring underclassmen from Montclair, Ridgewood, Nutley, Belleville, Kearny and Teaneck high schools, will take place at the Kearny Crew House on May 2 beginning at 9:00 a.m. More than 340 high school athletes are expected to take part. Varsity teams from those schools will also take place in an exhibition race as part of the day's events.

"For more than a decade now, PVSC has spent considerable time and funds to expand our mission from just wastewater treatment to revitalizing the Passaic River and its role and value to the region," said PVSC Chairman Thomas Powell. "We created the River Restoration Program to not only help clean up the Passaic, but to re-focus attention to its attributes, its beauty, its functional uses for the community."

"This regatta will allow younger rowers, just learning the sport, to participate in a real competition that will hopefully attract spectators from all the communities participating as well as other towns along the river," said PVSC Commissioner Frank Donato, who first came up with the idea to create and sponsor the regatta. "By seeing this kind of use on the Passaic, we hope that residents will begin to understand that the river really does have so much to offer economically and recreationally."

"A century ago, the Passaic River was the centerpiece of the quality of life of residents in this region. Our goal is to make that so once again," Donato added.

"Belleville High School is delighted to participate in the Novice races," said Jeff Lahm, Belleville High School's girls' crew coach. "As members of the Philadelphia Scholastic Rowing Association our team does most of their competing in Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River. This is a great opportunity for family and friends who cannot make the drive to Philly to see their athletes in action. We are grateful to the Passaic Valley

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Sewerage Commissioners for hosting this Regatta and for all they have done to beautify the river and the area around the Kearny boathouse.”

“A Novice Regatta is a long time coming to the Passaic River,” said Kearny Councilwoman Carol Jean Doyle. “Through the combined efforts of the PVSC sponsoring cleanups along the Passaic River, hard work and the dedication of many committed volunteers this Regatta is a dream becoming a reality. The Town of Kearny applauds this wonderful opportunity for local residents.

“I am happy to say that for 18 years I have coordinated an annual cleanup and I personally see the difference with PVSC 's Education Program in our local schools<” Doyle added. “Reaching out has made a change in the way young people respect our river. Students and volunteers take ownership in the river when they clean and sort trash along the water edge. I hope this is one of many opportunities for Kearny residents to see the return of a premier waterway and the efforts of many be enjoyed not only on May 2 but for years to come.”

"As a crew coach, I have to say that the PVSC has proven itself to be an invaluable resource to the rowing community along the Passaic River,” said David Paszkiewicz, who leads the Kearny High School team. “They have a true interest in bringing the Passaic River back to its former glory and are very supportive of activities which promote the use of the river. They regularly skim the river keeping it free of debris which is not only unsightly but could also pose a risk to crews rowing on the river. In addition, they offer education on the Passaic River environment and assist in as well as sponsor river cleanups. I can't say enough about their commitment to the communities of the Passaic River valley.”

To ready for the regatta, PVSC Restoration Program staff helped clean the riverbank in the area of the Kearny Crew House, removing litter and debris. The PVSC team also constructed a moveable dock system, cleaned the Crew House parking areas and constructed a temporary enclosure where the teams can house their boats.

“The Commissioners created the River Restoration Program 10 years ago with the idea that it could be used to help clean up the Passaic River,” said PVSC Executive Director Bryan Christiansen. “It began with our staff organizing volunteer riverbank clean-ups and evolved from there.

“We now have the staff and equipment to conduct much more complex clean-ups that not only help beautify the river, but can also aid in flood mitigation,” Christiansen continued. “We added our skimmer vessels a few years later to remove floating debris on the river, and have expanded our programmatic functions to include our Education Outreach Program, specific projects with our member towns and counties, and sponsorship of river-related events like the Novice Regatta.”

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Since its inception, the River Restoration Program has yielded impressive environmental statistics: 313 organized volunteer clean-ups; 207 organized school group clean-ups; 78 shoreline restoration projects, and 7,000 tons of debris removed from the Passaic River.

On May 16, the River Restoration Program is also a co-sponsor of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Passaic River Paddle Relay, a nine-mile amateur canoe and kayak competition which runs from Riverbank Park in Newark to Rutherford.