

Masters Regatta Slated for 2018

BY JACOB OGLES | MONDAY SEP 14, 2015

UNIVERSITY PARK -- It seems the international rowing community has developed a long-term endearment with University Park. The FISA Ordinary Congress announced last week that Nathan Benderson Park would host the 2018 World Rowing Masters Regatta, an event expected to draw even more attendees than the 2017 World Rowing Championships scheduled here in 2017. A team of international dignitaries—which included Sarasota personalities Paul Blackketter, president of The Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center, and Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County—was present for a ceremony in Chambéry, France when the bid was awarded.

“We want to have sustained events,” said Haley. “Part of the plan is just to keep going after additional international events.” Similar Masters Regatta events in Europe have attracted some 3,000 attendees, and while FISA officials expect an event in North America will more likely draw in the 2,000 area, that’s still considerably more than than roughly 1,500 expected to attend the World Championship in 2017. And there seems to be growing interest overseas for Nathan Benderson Park, a publicly owned venue near The Mall at University Town Center. “This is the third



Provided photo: A signing ceremony in Chambéry, France was attended by: Tone Pahle, Masters Rowing Commission chair; Jean-Christophe Rolland, FISA president; Paul Blackketter (signing), Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center president; Matt Smith, FISA executive director; Erin O’Connell, US Rowing board president; and Virginia Haley, Visit Sarasota County president.

rowing championship where we have been there promoting Sarasota,” Haley said, “and this time, it was less ‘So where is Sarasota-Bradenton?’ and more , ‘Yes, we will be coming and we look forward to it.’ You can tell the difference.”

Haley said officials in this region will seek other international events; Visit Sarasota County already has eyes on an under-23 rowing championship and a junior rowing championship. The venue, which has also held Pentathlon events, will also be promoted for other sporting uses, whether it’s canoe and kayak events on the water or marathon events on the shore.