

## Annual tug of war ends with a familiar result

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The sky was gray, the air was damp and cold, but they didn't care. Because when the rain stopped, the beer came out and the self-proclaimed Maritime Republic of Eastport walloped Annapolis in yet another tug of war — the 10th in the history of the MRE.



By Eric Salzberg -- The Capital  
August Deimel helps the Suntrust Bank team of Annapolis defeat Eastport's BB&T Bank team.

But unlike the MRE's sweeping victory last year, this year's score was close to tied — Eastport won three heats and Annapolis won two.

"They are on the juice," said Leslie Pierson of Eastport, after her team lost to Annapolis in the third heat. "And I haven't had a drink yet. That's the problem, I need fuel."

The "Slaughter Across the Water," as it is sometimes called, usually spans the Gulf of Eastport (Spa Creek), with each team on its own turf.

But this year, Annapolis scheduled construction at City Dock for the tug weekend, so the annual battle was fought on Eastport's Fourth Street.

Of course, conspiracy theories abounded.

"Those sneaky people on that side are constructing City Dock this weekend. Coincidence? I think not," said Kevin Brooks, a band member with the Eastport Oyster Boys, which performed between tugs.

"They act like we're part of their community, but when tug comes to shove..." said Mark Travaghlini, shaking his head. He was named Premier of the MRE this year after a quasi-election: The Supreme Court threw out the election results and he was put in

office, he said.

The first tug of war, pitting Eastport against The World (aka Annapolis) took place in 1998, the year Eastport seceded from Annapolis.

That year, the Maryland State Highway Administration shut down the drawbridge that connects Annapolis to Eastport for repairs. Concerned for the welfare of Eastport businesses, residents revolted and — tongues firmly in cheek — declared independence from Annapolis.

On Super Bowl Sunday 1998, the Maritime Republic of Eastport was founded and a declaration of independence, penned in the bathtub by Eastport resident Jefferson Holland, was signed and hung in Eastport's Boatyard Bar and Grill.

"The bathtub is a very creative place for me," Mr. Holland said yesterday.

The rebellion worked. In its first year, the Tug of War increased business in Eastport by 15 percent, Mr. Brooks said. But the tug is about more than just business.

"It's the excitement in a community that celebrates its uniqueness and independent spirit," Mr. Brooks said.

It's about pride in being the working, stepsister town of Annapolis proper. And it's about raising money for charity.

Over 10 years, the event has raised \$200,000 for local charities, Mr. Brooks said. This year, money from the tug went to the OIC Job Readiness Center, Eastport Elementary School, the Annapolis Maritime Museum, the Civil Air Patrol and the Anne Arundel County SPCA.

It began yesterday, as always, at the Crack 'O Noon.

Extra security guards, wearing "MRE Homeland Security" T-shirts, mixed with the crowd. This was the first year the opposing sides could see each other without a large body of water in between, and with the rivalry, event organizers decided to take extra precautions, said Stephanie Hertzog, Minister of Propaganda for the MRE.

"We gotta protect the homeland," Mr. Travaghlini said.

The war began with the consecrating of a new 300-foot rope, a temporary replacement for the 1,700-foot rope used in previous years across the water. The new rope was blessed with water from the Gulf of Eastport (Spa Creek) over a "lifelike replica" of the gulf — a children's wading pool with toy boats and rubber ducks.

In the first tug, the Eastport women beat the Annapolis women in just seconds. "It's steroids, I think," said Megan Cureton, after tugging for the Annapolis women. "I'm pretty sure we're going to do urine testing next year."

Steve Picarde tugged for the Eastport men in the second round, defeating the Annapolis men. "It wasn't brute strength, it was pride," he said. But it helped that he drank a couple beers before hand for "beer muscles," he said.

But then the Annapolis bars team (mostly bar customers) beat the MRE bars.

"I think they had a pickup truck over there," said Gavin Cain of Eastport.

In the final heat, the MRE was barely an inch away from winning a tough tug when a fan at the end of the rope took off his hat and waved his arms to signal victory.

But the refs hadn't yet called the match, and when several MRE tuggers let go of the rope, Annapolis pulled back hard and won before the MRE could get their grip back.

Eastport tuggers were livid.

"I think the ref was from Annapolis," said Eastportarican Josh Barron.

But Jon Salvia, official trash talker for Annapolis, said "that's total rumor-mongering. I think there was some money changing hands" in the tugs that Annapolis lost, he added suspiciously.

Mike Pachler, MRE's Minister of War, said the MRE would take it up with the International Tugging Federation.

"But it's for charity, so really we'll just have to come back next year," he said.

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- No Jumps-