On Saturday, October 24, 2020, Clean Ocean Action’s (COA) 3rd annual surf contest, The COA Open, took place at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park in Long Branch, NJ. The contest, originally scheduled for Saturday, October 10th, was postponed due to lack of contestable waves. Fortunately, the Monmouth County Parks System was flexible enough to allow the event to be held on any day conditions were best. Saturday, October 24 proved to be worth the wait! With great weather and waves, surfers in eight divisions and hundreds of spectators enjoyed epic surf conditions! Ranging from 6-year-old grom Kevin Flaherty to local pros, contestants of all ages and skill levels turned out to celebrate one of the ocean’s greatest gifts – clean, glassy waves – and support ocean protection. The COA Open raised over $25,000 this year due to overwhelming support from the sponsors, contestants, and supporters.

Some of the best professional surfers in NJ and NY, including Mike Gleason, Jon Smyth, Keith Noonan, Pat Parenty, and Alex Brooks, awed socially-distanced spectators with Mike Gleason taking 1st place at the contest. Mike Gleason (photo on right), co-owner of TAK Waterman in Long Branch, donated a portion of the proceeds he won for taking place 1st place in the Pro division back to Clean Ocean Action.

Kevin Flaherty and his sister Amanda Flaherty both took “Chargers of the Day” for the Boys and Girls divisions. Pictured on the left (L-R): Olivia Wheeler, Amanda Flaherty, and the contest’s youngest grom, 6-year-old Kevin Flaherty.

Pat Parenty competed in the Men’s and Pro divisions and won 1st Place in the Men’s division.

"Everyone was in a true-blue festive mood for the 3rd Annual Surf Open -- including the ocean! The waves, sponsors, riders and spectators were all spectacular! This sea-rific event is all thanks to Scott and Tyler Thompson and their extended family and friends who championed and coordinated the event," said Cindy Zipf, COA’s Executive Director. "Nearly 400 people attended the dawn to dusk contest which has come a long way since the legacy event was held on a cold January day in 1987 with a few dozen friends," she added.

Professional photographer Tom Zapcic has offered to split net proceeds with COA from the sales of his photos. Visit his link to order pics of your favorite surf star and beach-goer! https://tomzapcicphotography.smugmug.com/COA-Surf-Contest-2020
Contest Director, Tyler Thompson (sitting), is receiving the microphone hand-off from his father in a gesture of turning the reigns over to the next generation. Scott organized the first COA surf contests in the late 1980s. Pictured standing left to right are Brett, Scott, and Mark Thompson with COA’s Chief Operating Officer, Mary-Beth Thompson.

“Saturday was an incredible day! Not just because we were gifted with great waves, weather, and surfing at this year’s COA Open, but because we brought together the community to help raise awareness and show the importance of protecting our most crucial natural resource, the ocean. A pod of dolphins even surfed in the lineup! The success of the event is due to the help of our committee members, volunteers, and sponsors who showed inspirational support of the local surf community, the event, and Clean Ocean Action. It is a testament to how special the ocean environment is to everyone and how we all need to protect it. We’re already looking forward to next year,” exclaimed Tyler Thompson, Contest Director.

This year, contestants raised additional funds for a clean ocean by participating in a fundraising contest. The tied winners, Eamon Griffin and Eugene Juryn (pictured left), will each receive a hand-shaped custom surfboard, generously donated by local shaper and contest judge Tom Eadon. This “contest within the contest” raised over $4,000. COA thanks all participants in the contest and all those who made donations!

Throughout the day, surfers and spectators enjoyed great weather and waves while appreciating complimentary food and drinks from Coffee Surf Co, Ugly Seltzer and delicious burgers from Hearthly Organic in Shrewsbury.

COA is most grateful to the remarkable event possible, beginning with the outstanding committee who brought it all together: Mike Gleason and Nick Spadavecchia of Tak Waterman Surf n Fish in Long Branch, Kyle Hopfensperger of 2nd Jetty Restaurant in Sea Bright, Luke McCann of Advisors Mortgage in Ocean Township, and especially the father and sons team of Scott Thompson and sons Tyler, Mark and Brett who have been dedicated to COA since 1984. Special thank you to Head Judge Joe Schluter and the judges (Max Berry, Tom Eadon, Drew Eastwood, Nico McMahon, Derf McTighe, Mark Thompson, and Steve Walker). Special thanks to all the great photographers who shared their talents!

For allowing the event to take place and for being extra flexible, the Monmouth County Freeholders and especially the Board of Recreation Commissioners of the Monmouth County Parks have COA’s sincere and beachy gratitude.

Waves of Thanks to Our Sponsors


In Kind Sponsors: BLDG Active, CarvinArt, Coffee Surf Co, Greenlines, Hearthly Organic, JDR Home Repair & Maintenance, TAK Waterman, TE Shapes, Ugly Seltzer, Volcom, and Volte Wetsuits

For a complete list of the winners and photos taken by various photographers, please visit https://surf.cleanoceanaction.org/.