

# Gerry 5 and Okos are Fired up about history

BY THOR JOURGENSEN

Charity and a love for Marblehead history define the Gerry 5 and Okos Veteran Firemen's Association, but at the heart of both local clubs is the muscle-straining, sweat-draining fun that defines handtub musters.



Handtubs are mid-19th-century firefighting vehicles resembling wagons outfitted with complicated-looking pipes. The Gerry 5 handtub was built in 1845 and the Okos' Okommakamesit (a Nipmuc Indian word that means "City of Hills" according to Handtub Junction, USA) was built in 1861.

The machines fought their last fires long ago, but they occupy places of honor in the Gerry's Beacon Street clubhouse basement and Okos' Washington Street quarters.

Members of both clubs test their endurance and brawn by wheeling the machines into a field and competing against other handtub clubs. Once in place, teams vigorously pump the priming bars and build up pressure in the handtub until it's ready to send a high-velocity jet of water arcing skyward.

"It's all about whoever gets the longest squirt," Gerry 5 Club manager Art Dodge said.

Town pride and bragging rights define muster participants' competitive spirit and their club's mission.

Gerry and Okos members take pride in preserving their handtubs and showing them off to town residents as examples of local history. The Okos was still called the Phoenix Association when it bought the Okommakamesit in 1895, according to Handtub Junction, and the handtub was the centerpiece of the organization's first anniversary celebration. Okos won its first muster a year later.

Earl Doliber, Okos secretary for 30 years, began mustering with a miniature



Art Dodge, Gerry 5 VFA club manager, speaks about the club's handtub.

PHOTO: SPENSER HASAK



The Okos Club in Old Town Marblehead.

PHOTO: OKOS SECRETARY EARL DOLIBER

handtub at age 9. "It's in the blood," he said.

The 120-member Okos took part in two musters this year, and earned a third-prize finish in Salem, Doliber said.

Named after former Massachusetts Governor and Vice President of the U.S. Elbridge Gerry, the Gerry 5 — like its Okos counterpart — was hauled by hand, not horsepower, to fires. Dodge credited late member Wayne Martin for maintaining the handtub for years and his sons, Dirk and Todd, who carry on

the tradition.

Founded in 1956 and claiming 1,100 members, the Gerry 5 is a nerve center for community service with the club hosting the annual July 4 Horribles parade, a Christmas party for children, dinners for seniors, the Marblehead-Swampscott Old Timers Football Dinner, the June firemen's breakfast, a golf tournament, and more.

"We've got something going seven days a week," Dodge said.