

# Connecticut River Raft Race Bubbles; Thousands Expected at Saturday Event

By CLAUDIA VAN NES

Three years ago, a few friends got together and decided to build a few rafts and race them from the Deep River town dock to Knotts Island in Essex. They had a lot of fun, drank a lot of beer and decided to make it an annual event.

Preparations for the 1978 Connecticut River Raft Race bear little resemblance to those modest beginnings. The raft committee has incorporated and the sponsors expect to raise \$10,000 for charity. Furthermore, it would surprise no one if as

many as 5,000 spectators showed up for the event scheduled Saturday at noon.

Committee Chairman Frank Burton Jr. said permission had to be gotten this year not just from town fathers but from the state Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Coast Guard and local and state police.

The Essex Lions Club will set up a beer and food concession on Knotts Island under a 135-foot tent, eight bands will provide music and a ferry will transport tourists from the foot of Main Street in Essex to and from the island. A master of

ceremonies will preside, a bus will take spectators from the Verplex parking lot into town and there will be three rescue boats, two doctors and many medical assistants.

About the only thing that Burton, other committee members and raft builders expect to be the same as past years is the free-flowing beer and the fun.

Burton said about 130 rafts probably will participate including the "Wet Dream IV" — a raft which Burton and friends pounded together and spirited across the river the first year of the

race. It's been remade each year since.

One year it was large enough to hold 60 people who dined on stuffed rock cornish game hens in hot dog rolls as they sailed to the island.

Joining the "Wet Dream" this year will be many rafts with names unsuitable to print. More benignly titled entries include the "Three Man Crewed," "Titanic," "The Horrendous" with 29 crew members, "The Riff Raff," "The Flotsam Jetsam," "The Rocky Horror Raft Ensemble" and in a tribute to an old Hollywood star, "The George Raft."