

# Raft Race Promises "Organized Chaos"

ESSEX - Overhead other parts of the river will appear normal - a tug pushing an oil barge might even suggest business as usual - but for almost a seven mile stretch between Deep River and Essex the waterway will be dotted with the bizarre spectacle of some 140 rafts.

The apparently "organized chaos" will make up part of the wake of countless modern day Huck Finns who starting at high noon on Saturday, July 22, will be competing in the Fourth Annual Great Connecticut River Raft Race.

At last count the organizers of the race, who have been planning since last winter for the yearly raft regatta, said over 100 entries had been filed officially, but that by the time the gun goes off a number of last minute racers could increase that figure to 140 rafts.

But regardless of the exact number of entries the race's brief history has seen its popularity mushroom at an annual rate of nearly 300 per cent - from seven rafts when Frank Burton first founded the event in 1975 to 20 entries in 1976 to 57 entries last year.

In an effort to keep up with the interest the race has generated, Frank Burton and a number of other Race Committee members have worked to make the preparations required to handle the estimated 3,500 to 5,000 persons they say could turn out for the race.

Plans have been made for the participants and spectators to park at the Vinal Tech School and busses are set to run people from there down to the river where there will be a ferry service from Steamboat Dock to Knotts Island.

On the island a new feature will include a 135 foot by 30 foot tent where the Lions Club is sponsoring a concession stand selling beer, hot dogs, and hamburgers. The other half of the tent area is set aside for the eight different bands scheduled to start playing in the afternoon and continuing well into the night.

"The race promises to be a very colorful event, and all the money goes to charity and that's the best part," Ken Fischburg, one of the organizers said this past week.

As in past years the race starts at the Deep River Landing and ends downriver at Knotts Island off of Steamboat Dock in Essex. On the island the winner is traditionally declared when the first crew member of a raft is able to reach a pewter mug and a keg of beer the committee has set up. A party for all participants then follows with the winning crew naturally owning the prized keg of beer.

Some of the names of past entries - "Happy Hour," "Cirrhosis of the River," and "The Waterbed" - speak to a certain degree of the event's "rafter madness." Crews are expected to be

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## 140 Raft Entrants Expected

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working all morning getting their rafts in the water, and some are even expected to launch their craft a few days before the race date on Saturday.

Since there are limited facilities at the Deep River Landing, no vehicles will be allowed to be left there. The actual start of the race is expected to be marked by a blast from a cannon.

The winner the last two years has been Morning Star II, captained by Dick Harding of East Haddam, with a paddlewheel powered by two bicycles oars, a sail, and a dragon's head with a blinking light.

Proceeds from the race go to three charities; Newington Children's Home, Ducks Unlimited, and the Ben Haven School for Retarded Children. There is a \$20 entry fee and an additional \$5 per person per crew paid the day of the race.