

G A Z E T T E  
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# Raft Race Set Despite Gripes

ESSEX - The Fifth Annual Connecticut River Raft Race will be launched as planned next week and although the number of entries are fewer than what was originally planned, the spirit of the race has not been dampened by complaints from some area town officials.

Race organizer Ken Fischburg said Monday that there will be about 100 entries in the race—nowhere near the 250 rafts limit announced by organizers last spring.

Rafts with names like "Blue Bayou" and "Lotsa This, Lotsa That" will launch from the Deep River town landing and race a seven mile stretch to Notts Island across from the Essex Town Dock on Saturday, August 4.

Fischburg said that all efforts will be made to keep spectators out of Essex. Last year, race sightseers crowded into Essex Village, prompting numerous complaints from businessmen and residents, and the Essex selectmen this year took a stand against the size and timing of the race.

This year, there will be no ferry service to Notts Island or parking in Essex for spectators. Fischburg said race organizers will hire constables and set up blockades at the roads leading into Essex so that anyone coming into the town will be informed that they cannot stay to watch the festivities on Notts Island.

At the end of the party on

Notts Island, rafters will have to find their own way back to the mainland, Fischburg said, but efforts will be made to keep them from rowing directly across the river to Essex.

Rafts may land at the public landing in Old Saybrook, Fischburg said, although First Selectwoman Barbara Maynard also has expressed objections to ending the race there.

Also expected to keep the size of the crowd down is a \$3 charge for any spectators who find a way over to the island. Race organizers said that last year they lost a great deal of potential revenue because spectators were not charged when they came over to the island where refreshments were served and bands entertained participants.

After expenses, proceeds from the race go to charity. Last year, the Connecticut River Raft Race Inc. donated about \$5,000 to nine charities.

Over the years, the race has grown in size at an annual rate of nearly 300 percent. Only seven rafts participated in the event when Frank Burton first founded it in 1975. The following year, there were 20 entries and that figure jumped to 57 rafts in 1977. Last year, somewhere between 100 and 140 rafts participated, and Fischburg said that this year will be about the same.

There is a \$20 entry fee for each raft and an additional \$5 per person crew member is charged. All rafts must be homemade.