

# River Raft Race Is On Despite Complaints

By Virginia Wright

ESSEX - Despite the objections registered by the selectmen last week, it appears likely that the annual Connecticut River Raft Race, with its projected 250 rafts, will be held as planned this summer.

The traffic and crowds which invaded Essex during last year's race led the selectmen last week to take a firm stand against the size and timing of the race which is scheduled for August 4.

The Coast Guard has been notified of the selectmen's position, but a spokesman for that agency said Friday that although there will be increased patrolling of the river during the race, the Coast Guard's permit is not likely to be revoked.

The permit has been reviewed and approved by the Coast Guard station in New Haven. It now goes to the Guard's New York office for a final review.

Raft race organizers say that they are doing everything possible to keep crowds out of Essex. "There will be no ferry from the Essex town dock to Notts Island," said Ken Fischburg, co-chairman of the event. "We are planning to work and do everything we can to keep raft race traffic out of Essex. We plan to have policemen at the three roads which enter into Essex and signs which will specify that there will be no watching of the race from Essex."

Since the first raft race was held five years ago, when only

six rafts were entered, the event has grown considerably both in size and in the attention it attracts from newspapers and spectators.

Last year, the race attracted some 5,000 spectators to Essex where the finish at Notts Island could be easily viewed. In addition, the race organizers conducted a ferry service from Essex town dock to the island where a large-scale beer party was held.

The selectmen, however, say that was too much for the town to handle and they are concerned about what this year's race, which promises to be even bigger, will bring. First Selectman Dick Riggio doesn't want the race to be near Essex at all.

"The organizers have offered to pay for constable patrol and said that they will patrol the river to keep boats away from Essex," Riggio said. "But the problem goes much beyond that. It shuts down the village for the day and the businesses don't like it. Everything in the village was at a complete standstill last year."

Last year, Riggio said, the raft race caused enough of a traffic problem to keep shoppers out of town. Residents of Essex Village also were annoyed by the spectators who "lied around on their lawns, drinking beer."

"I think they could see last year--with the numbers of rafts--that it was out of control," said Riggio. "The problem is not

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