

COURANT
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Merchant Tells Selectman Of Worries About Raft Race

Essex

ESSEX — Joanne Wery, the owner of a Main Street gift shop and representing the Essex Township Board of Trade, told First Selectman Richard Riggio Monday merchants fear that potential customers will be directed away from Main Street during the raft race Aug. 4.

During the race last year, constables directed traffic coming down Main Street to take a left onto Ferry Street. Potential shoppers never got to stores near Main Street, Mrs. Wery said. Her shop, "Far Away Things," is located in a cluster of stores near the end of the street and she claimed, "We had one customer the entire day. We don't want that to happen again."

Merchants also complained after last year's race that drunken and disorderly spectators waiting for boat rides to Knott Island upset potential shoppers.

Riggio wanted to prevent the race from being held this year but the state and

Coast Guard gave permits to the organizers who agreed to limit the number of entries to 100 rafts and to eliminate the boat shuttle from the town dock to the island.

Riggio said he will post constables at entrances to town to warn motorists about limited parking and to tell them the race isn't visible from the town's shores, and that transportation to the island wouldn't be available.

"The police will make sure people are in town for a purpose. They will stop every car," Riggio said.

"It is not the intention of the police to keep people out of the village who have come to browse or visit," Riggio said.

Mrs. Wery said the Board of Trade supports Riggio's efforts.

Mrs. Wery said she is hopeful that parking restrictions would be strictly enforced as promised by Riggio and that "things will be better than last year."

"It was a day and night of horrors. I'm seriously considering spending the night in my shop this year to make sure no rowdy drunks do something terrible," Mrs. Wery said.