

Raft Racers Avoid Village; Riggio Pleased With Results

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By Virginia Wright

ESSEX - Although his opposition to the event was strong prior to the raft race, First Selectman Dick Riggio said Monday that he was "very pleased with the outcome" of Saturday's race.

"It went along very well," Riggio said. "Whether or not the rain put a damper on it, I'm not sure, but I suspect it probably did."

Last year, Essex Village was overrun with crowds of spectators who wanted to get over to Nott Island by way of a shuttle service which had been set up by race organizers at the town dock. Some business people said the crowds discouraged shoppers, and the town's emergency groups reportedly were concerned about obstacles to access down Main Street.

That prompted Riggio, who said that last year's event had been "out of control," to take a stand against this year's race. In June he said he wanted to see the location of the event changed because Essex's position across from Nott Island put the town at a disadvantage.

Control was promised, however, from the race organizers and the Coast Guard, and Riggio said that seemed to solve the town's problems with the race, which has grown during the past five years from a small, informal event to a large-scale attraction bringing in hundreds of rafters and spectators.

All fifteen of the town's constables were on duty during the race and the party on Nott Island, and Riggio said that the race organizers have promised to pay for those patrols.

"The police people did a superb job of keeping traffic

moving and yet they kept the village going in an active way for the business people," Riggio said. "Last year our biggest problem was with the shuttle and the elimination of that helped tremendously. But we did have a number of people come into town looking for it.

"The thing I did see is that there were concerted efforts on the part of many groups," Riggio said. "We did add a good number of constables and the state police put out a good number of their people. We had some of our people in the police

(Continued on Page 19A)

Race Calm

1979

(Continued From Page 6A)

boat on the river and there were the Coast Guard and DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) personnel."

Riggio said that "there was a steady flow of traffic with no place to park" on Main Street, but police managed to keep cars moving so that shoppers could

get around the village.

"But the number of rafts seemed to have been reduced. This year there were only about

100 but we had 150 last year. I think that this time we saw as many as could be handled," said Riggio.

100 ACRES RESTAURANT