

## MIDDLETOWN

# River Race Leaves Good Will in its Wake

By JULIE LALO

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HADDAM — More than 5,000 people descended on the town's riverfront for the Connecticut River Raft Race a few weeks ago and left in their wake money in merchants' coffers and a bigger bank account for the Haddam Jaycees.

And now it looks like the race, which had become unwelcome farther down the river, might have found a friendly port.

First Selectman Lawrence Conti says, "If we would have a repetition of this year, I certainly wouldn't mind having the race back." Officials with the state Department of Environmental Protection seem pleased with the results of the Aug. 1 race, and race promoters say they hope to return.

Race organizer Ken Fischburg said Thursday that if the DEP accepts his

application he would like to see the event back in Haddam. The promoters must apply yearly to the DEP for permission to have the race and accompanying festivities on state-owned property.

Fischburg said they will begin to develop next year's race in January. "But," he said, "we've already received applications from interested rafters."

The race began this year at Hurd State Park and ended at Haddam Meadows State Park, the scene of post-race activities.

The day before the race, residents and local officials were gritting their teeth and getting ready for the hoards they expected to arrive.

State troopers had about six riot control dogs. Conservation officers from the DEP were prepared for difficulties concerning Haddam Meadows

State Park's 8 p.m. closing time. And landowners next to the park had put up snow fences to keep cars from parking on their property.

So what happened?

The hoards came. But there were no traffic tie-ups, no singing and dancing in the streets, and the crowd that nearly doubled the population of Haddam that day left quietly by 8 p.m.

"Some people in town didn't even know there was anything going on," said Mark Lundgren, owner of Lundgren's Liquor Locker. "That's because you could not tell from the traffic."

In its seven years, the race had become publicized as a party for the participants and race followers and something of a pain in the neck for the town where the unusual race ended.

Previously, the race had started in Deep River and ended in Essex, where the stream of summer visitors already floods the town's population.

"Moving the race to Haddam Meadows just eliminated some of the problems," said Fred Pogmore, DEP chief of law enforcement. An island was used at the end of the race in Essex, causing some serious problems, he added. Private boatowners were ferrying people to the island, charging passengers for the trip, and several

people swimming in the river had to be fished out, Coast Guard officials said.

This year's race was different. A relatively orderly chain of events, beginning with the start at Hurd State Park and ending with the day-long celebration at Haddam Meadows, the race appears to have been a success from all viewpoints.

Dave Morrison, president of Haddam Jaycees, said the success shouldn't be measured by the race itself. "I've been going to the raft race for three years and I never knew that money from the race went to charity. It made a difference to me that the promoters didn't just pocket the money and walk away."

The race promoters did give money to charities in the state. They gave \$300 to Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Southeastern Connecticut, \$200 to the Shoreline Chapter of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and \$500 to the Little White Schoolhouse, a day-care agency for children 1½ to 7 years old with cerebral palsy and related disorders.

The Haddam Jaycees ran a concession, selling food, drinks and T-shirts, and for their time and efforts were awarded \$650 by Fischburg. "If they come back next year," Morrison said, "we'd set up the same deal."