

## 50th annual Westfield River Wildwater Races on tap

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Conditions may be ripe this weekend to produce a new record for the 12-mile professional run in the 50th annual Westfield River Wildwater Canoe Races.

"There was plenty of snowfall this winter to produce sufficient runoff water and the river is high and fast right now," race organizer Jeffrey M. DeFeo said last week. "With a little tail wind the record could be broken," he said.

The current record of 1:12:30 was set in 2001 by Paul A. Facticeau of Easthampton and Edward P. Hamel of Southamptton. Hamel and Facticeau said at that time that they believed another 30 seconds can be shaved from that milestone.

Racing, sponsored by The Republican, will begin Saturday in novice classes along an eight-mile course starting at the Massachusetts Highway Department yard in Huntington Center. Registration for novice racers will begin at 8 a.m. and the race starts at 10 a.m.

On Sunday, professionals will compete in a 12-mile race that starts at 11 a.m. at the base of Knightville Dam off Route 112. Registration for professionals begins at 9:30 a.m.. Both courses include two portages.

This year's racing will feature at least two of the originators of the race.

Richard F. Langill, 71, now residing in Crownsville, Md. and John Gorham of Northford, Conn. say they will be here this weekend to help celebrate the 50th anniversary. Also expected to attend are John Tucker, Michael Vela and Frank Berdahowski, all of Westfield. They started the race which originally started in Chester and ended at the Wipperton Golf Course in Russell.

There is a little confusion on the exact reason for starting the race according to Langill and Gorham but both agreed that because of the effort the race is now considered the oldest consecutively run whitewater race in the country.

Several first-time participants are expected this year. More than 50 paddlers took advantage of three clinics held during the past three weeks by DeFeo and members of the Westfield River Canoe Club.

"I am nervous but more excited really," said Hannah E. Long, 13, of Huntington. Long participated in two of the clinics and said she is "ready to compete" in her first race.

Robert Genereux is trying canoe racing "as a new form of recreation." The 62-year-old Westfield resident said last week "This is a new experience. Its great excitement. I will probably spend more time in the water than on it."

Russell's Amy L. Reifsnnyder is also a first-time competitor. "This is my first experience in the race but I have some knowledge of this. I was invited by Jeff (DeFeo). He new I was interested," Reifsnnyder said.

Last year's races drew about 250 novice and 20 professional entries. DeFeo said the same number is expected this year.

Results and awards will be announced at 4 p.m. both days at Gateway Regional High School located off Littleville Road. There are awards in all novice classes and a \$1,000 cash first prize in the pro class in the expert race. A \$500 cash bonus is offered for a new course record.

DeFeo said racing on both days will end 90-minutes after the last boat enters the river.

A new and used equipment sale will be held at Gateway High School from noon to 6 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

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