

# Novice paddlers first to get wet

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By **GEORGE GRAHAM**

**Staff writer**

HUNTINGTON - Novice paddlers hit the water today as the 50th annual Westfield River Wildwater Canoe Races get under way.

"The weather is looking like it's going to cooperate, we have a lot of early entries and plenty of water," race organizer Jeffrey M. DeFeo said this week.

The novice classes will test their skills along an 8-mile course starting at the state Highway Department yard in the town center. Registration will begin at 8 a.m. and the race starts at 10.

Tomorrow, 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.

The races, sponsored by The Republican, are believed to be the longest continuous running canoe race in the country. The Westfield City Council honored DeFeo and fellow organizer Jurgen Igel Thursday night for their extensive volunteer efforts for the races over the years.

A number of 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. Last year's races drew about 250 novice and 20 professional entries.

Results and awards will be announced at 4 p.m. each day at Gateway Regional High School on 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 and DeFeo said conditions may be ripe to produce one.

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 the high school each day.

Photos and video clips of past races can be found on the Huntington Police Department Web site. Officer Todd M. Michon said he will update it with new photos and clips next week. George Graham can be reached at [ggraham@repub.com](mailto:ggraham@repub.com)