

Clinic canoeists practice for race
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HUNTINGTON - Dozens of novice and experienced canoe enthusiasts participated yesterday in the final paddling clinic before next week's Westfield River Wildwater Races.

The clinic, held despite the low water conditions, started at 1 p.m. in the state Department of Public Works yard on Route 112. Many participants came to the site much earlier, though, to prepare their canoes or kayaks and to talk to each other.

David Andersen and his wife, Diane Duffie, were among those seeking some tips before going into water.

"We've been doing (river canoeing) for a good long time, but this is our first time up here on this river, being involved with this whole event," said Andersen who lives in Belchertown.

The 53rd Westfield Wildwater races, dedicated this year to Jurgen G. Igel, a long-time co-chairman of the event who passed away in July, will be held on Saturday and Sunday.

The Saturday race, which begins at the state Department of Public Works yard, is eight miles long and is for novice classes. Registration begins at 8 a.m. and the race begins at 10 a.m.

Professionals and experts compete in a 12-mile race that begins the next day at the base of Knightville Dam, located off Route 112. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. and the race begins at 11 a.m.

"We are not going to do the competitive one on Sunday, but we are thinking about doing Saturday race," Duffie said.

Low water levels caused the cancellation of the first paddling clinic, but for the second clinic the weather was perfect, organizers said.

Erin Lylis, of Easthampton, will be in the novice race with her boyfriend, Joe Green, also of Easthampton.

Lylis said she was excited to have her first actual race.

"I've done river canoeing before, but not any races. It'll be fun. Joe has actually done this race several times - for him it'll be the fourth race - so he's had experience," Lylis said.

She said she enjoyed the opportunity just to be outside, too.

"Canoeing is exciting, it's something to do in the early spring - get outside and get some fresh air. That's what it's all about," she said.