

# The Republican.

## 54th Westfield river races slated

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The 54th annual Westfield River Wildwater Races in Huntington start on Saturday when the novice racers take to the river. Organizer Jeffrey M. DeFeo said the river, which flooded in a number of areas on Monday due to heavy rains, should subside to manageable levels by the weekend. About a quarter of the anticipated 200 Saturday paddlers end up dunking, usually in the Hill & Dale rapids where most of the spectators tend to gather to watch the action, organizer DeFeo said. Those who flip, however, will have a rescue team of five kayakers who will do their best to get them on their way again, DeFeo said.

Registration begins at 8 a.m. on Saturday and the race begins two hours later at the state Department of Public Works yard off Route 112 in Huntington.

Cost, for those who haven't signed up in advance, is \$17 per paddler.

Registration for Sunday's expert race begins at 9:30 a.m. at the base of Knightville Dam and the race begins at 11 a.m.

Cost is again \$17 per paddler save for the pro class, which competes for a \$1,000 cash prize and payouts back to 34 places. Pro class cost is \$20 per paddler.

Of the anticipated 75 boats on Sunday, about 30 will be in the pro class, DeFeo said.

Prize money includes another \$500 for breaking the course record, but DeFeo said the river will not likely be flowing hard and high enough to break the record.

"Which is fine," DeFeo said. "We'd rather not have it crazy like that."

The races, the oldest continuously run whitewater races in the country, attract paddlers from throughout New England and beyond. Knowledge of the river, and not so much paddling strength, is what it take to win at the pro level, DeFeo said. "A lot of it is knowing where to go, not taking on water," DeFeo said.

The race record of 1:12:32 was set by Paul Facteau, of Westfield, and Edward Hamel, of Southampton. Races both days are by time trail, with boats leaving at one minute intervals. It takes a small army of timers - four at the start and six at the finish - to keep accurate track of the paddlers, DeFeo said. "It is pretty involved," DeFeo said, adding that a runner then brings the various tally sheets to Gateway Regional High School where they are entered into a computer by Agawam resident Brian Greaney.

Greaney received a Jurgen G. Igel service award last year for his help with the races. This year, the award will go to Russell resident Lyle G. Maxwell who has been a start timer since 1983.

"He is a fixture there," DeFeo said. "He does both days."

Igel, who passed away in July 2005, was a fixture in his own right. He had served as co-chairman of the races with DeFeo since 1983.

A scholarship in Igel's name, to be given to a deserving Gateway Regional High School student, will be awarded on Saturday before the race.

After the race, awards and the post-race celebration will take place at the high school.

There will be a new and used equipment sale on both days, from noon to 6 p.m., at the high school.