



More than 300 paddlers are expected at the derby, but only a fraction will finish. Spectators who prefer to stay dry on the shore are also welcome.

More mild, but still

# wild



The “second generation” Wild Water Derby in Shortsville promises quite a ride.



Story by Marci Diehl

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN THE TIE-DYED DAWN OF THE EARLY 1970S, THE Wild Water Derby in Shortsville was a daredevil free-for-all raft race surrounded by a giant, miles-long beer kegger, with a real chance for a trip in an ambulance for participants and spectators alike.

No more.

Now Starbucks, an official sponsor, will be providing designer coffees at the derby, and corporate sponsors New Energy Works and Shepard Ford will team with the Manchester/Shortsville Chamber of Commerce to bring what is still one of the wettest, wildest, most fun “family and friends” events in the area, April 26-27.

“It used to be held on the first Sunday in April,” says Matt Schaertel, one of the event’s organizers, “which could mean snow, ice and highs in the mid-20s. There were lots of accidents, broken bones and hypothermia. Fortunately, there were no fatalities. There were no high-tech materials then, either—it was wool and cotton clothing.”

Insurance and alcohol became a big issue. Eventually, the event ended. But in 2004, when the Shortsville and Manchester Chambers of Commerce merged, they wanted to start a drive to benefit the community tax base. So they brought the derby back—minus the beer—and made it affordable for all families. The event is completely financed by the private sector, and the Chamber has given over all the concessions sales to non-profits such as Rotary, Lions, YMCA, school scholarships, 4H, Safe Kids, Boy Scouts and many others.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILD WATER DERBY

Fun is still at the heart of the event. Rafts are homemade and can be anything from plastic wine barrels lashed together to “extremely creative,” Schaertel says. “We’ve had choppers, giant crocodiles and one that was a dune buggy built like the one in the *Cars* movie, with a custom paint job. The DEC had one in camo with duck decoys trailing behind, and the Marines built one called The Marine Mantis.”

Today, with the date pushed back to later in April, the weather for the derby has a chance of being warm and sunny. And the Chamber isn’t about to mess around with safety. Participants must wear Coast Guard approved water helmets, which are available for a minimal rental charge and then are turned in at the end of the day.

The derby course runs on the Canandaigua Outlet and starts in Shortsville. The gates are opened at the lake, and water rushes to Shortsville/Manchester, continuing north to the Newark/Lyons area. This water once powered mills along the route.

These are class 3 rapids (officially, that

means the waters might require “significant maneuvering,” and experienced paddling skills are needed). The waters here can run from three-foot deep to between eight- and 10-foot deep in some areas. So don’t think the new, gentler version of the Wild Water Derby is any less intense for participants.

**There can be crashes, falls and riders clinging to rocks or hanging onto the rafts.**

There can be crashes, falls and riders clinging to rocks or hanging onto the rafts. The course will be lined with firemen from five companies with EMS support. Cables will be stretched across the water to snatch people up and pull them out quickly if they get in trouble or capsize.

Saturday’s race, which will start at noon, will last approximately half an hour. About

a third of the rafts make it to the end—all the others get dumped after about 200 yards, Schaertel says. Snow fencing all along the water’s edge will protect thousands of spectators and the adjacent lawns of neighbors.

Besides the actual raft derby, there are other races on Sunday, including a 1,200-foot slalom and a drop-jump-and-sprint kayak race. Other activities include judging and prizes for the favorite raft, and a barbecue with music and a bonfire on Saturday night. A huge heated tent will serve the expected 3,000 to 4,000 spectators. This year, 300 paddlers have signed up.

“The teens have returned to the Derby. There are a lot of girls who do it, too,” Scheartel says. “We’re getting people from all over western New York, and as far away as West Virginia and South Carolina. These are people who love to race. They’ve heard how good our rapids are.”

For more information, visit [www.shortsvillemanchesterareachamberofcommerce.com](http://www.shortsvillemanchesterareachamberofcommerce.com) or call 289-6373. ■



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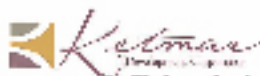
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