Paddle Fest to roll on the Reedy

Sixth annual event is both family- and environment-friendly

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Once upon a time, the Reedy River was considered by many to be Greenville's sewer. Ugly, stinky and laden with litter, it was an eyesore.

That was then. This is now. The Reedy is now celebrated as a downtown Greenville destination, a recreational resource, and a focal point for the future.

Nowhere is the Reedy River's resurgence more evident than at the Reedy River Paddle Fest, this year set for May 14.

The sixth annual event celebrates the river as a paddling spot for kayakers, canoeists and those seeking recreation in their backyard.

"Ten years ago, people never thought about paddling the Reedy," said Joe Lanahan, program manager for the Greenville County Recreation Department and Paddle Fest event director. "And honestly, the Rec. Department wasn't on the environmental stewardship side back then.

"But we are now. And this event, and what we're doing down at Conestee Nature Park, is very important."

It's important, because the event reminds people that they don't have to head to the mountains to find a suitable river-paddling location.

Eventually, Greenville Recreation plans to establish a Blue Way Trail along the Reedy, and the festival helps toward that end.

"The crowd we've had has always been steady, but never really big," he said. "But this is open and suitable for novice paddlers. We didn't have anyone spill last year."

The roughly 3-mile stretch of river from Log Shoals Road to Greenville Tech's Brashier campus has some Class II and even Class III rapids depending on rainfall. In between, there are stretches of calmer water.



The annual Reedy River Paddlefest finishes at the Greenville Tech Brashier campus in Simpsonville.

REEDY RIVER PADDLE FEST

Participant check-in and late registration is at the take-out, located at Greenville Technical College's Brashier campus on West Georgia Road. Here is the schedule for the Reedy River Paddle Fest on May 14:

- 9:30 a.m. — Check-in and late registration begins.
- 10 a.m. — Shuttle service begins.
- 11 a.m. — Shuttle service ends.
- 11 a.m. — Race starts.
- Noon — Awards ceremony.

The race fee is $25. Register at: http://go-greenevents.com/reedyriverpaddlefest

More information and a map are available at: http://images.go-greenevents.com/14/Reedy%20River%20PaddleFest%20info%202011.pdf

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And again, depending on water levels, participants may need to scout, run or portage through rapids and/or low spots.

"We say a novice paddler can handle this," Lanahan said. "There is a big Class II rapid, but if you keep paddling you can get through it fine."

The race has three classes, for men, women and tandem. Time adjustments are made based on boat length.

Both kayaks and canoes are allowed, and all paddlers must wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket and helmet at all times on the river.