

Cardboard boat race: It's all about style — and stability

BY STEFANIE FRAZIER

For The Beacon-News

For last summer's "What Floats Your Cardboard Boat Race," Ryan Dowd donned a stringy blonde wig and mini skirt and rode the waves on a hippie Volkswagen-shaped boat made out of cardboard.

"So, generally speaking we don't have the fastest boat," said Dowd, executive director of Aurora's Hesed House shelter. "In fact, we're pretty lucky if it makes it to the finish line" in the annual fundraising competition for the Fox Valley United Way.

Dowd admitted that speed is not the forte of the Hesed House participants.

"Style is where we tend to shine," he said.

Deborah L. Collins, director of administration for Fox Valley United Way, said 23 boats will be racing on Saturday at the 10th annual competition at Mastodon Lake at Phillips Park. Judging is at 10 a.m. and the race starts at 10:30 a.m.

"The boats are put into heats so that they're actually floating or competing against other boats in the same category," Collins said. "So, youth will float against youth. Businesses will compete against businesses, non-profits against non-profits ... It gets very exciting."

Contestants will ride their boats made of cardboard and stylized to resemble something like say, an authentic tractor or police car. Collins said there is a starting gate and then contestants go around a buoy and head to the finish line.

At least that's the idea.

"And it gets very competitive toward the end because the biggest award is given to the best overall time in the race," Collins said.



A Caterpillar crew mans their cardboard boat in the Fox Valley United Way's annual race in 2009. Caterpillar is making another "see-worthy" vessel for Saturday's annual competition and fundraiser at Mastodon Lake in Aurora's Phillips Park. | FILE PHOTO

AT A GLANCE

What: What Floats Your Cardboard Boat Race, the annual fundraising competition for the Fox Valley United Way

When: Saturday — judging at 10 a.m. and the race at 10:30 a.m.

Where: Mastodon Lake at Phillips Park in Aurora

That award, a grand, columned trophy, is a bit over two feet.

And there are more awards to be earned — like a people's choice, team spirit and best sinking.

Aurora Fire Chief Hal Carlson was happy with last year's Fire Department entry: "We won our heat. We won the fastest time."

Dowd proudly spoke of Hesed House taking home the best sinking trophy.

"That's a pretty coveted award," he said. "We got it displayed quite proudly and prominently here," in the lobby at the Hesed House.

Meanwhile, Madhu Bevini, fa-

cilities engineer of Caterpillar, has participated on the building team of their 980K tractor that is in the medium wheel loader family.

"It's all about sustainability," Bevini assured.

The event is a chance to create awareness of Fox Valley United Way and the variety of agencies they support to benefit the community.

There will be food and other fun at Saturday's race.

Brian Basilico from B2b Interactive Marketing will play boat themed tunes throughout the competition — including the happily rockin' tune about "don't rock the boat, baby."

The young at heart can get their face painted and balloon artist Rich Centeno will be making balloon creations.

Dowd said the Hesed House has "pushed the envelope" on costumes this year. But whatever is planned for Saturday is being kept top secret.

"You've got to come see it," Dowd said.