

GREENFIELD

Organizer looks to boost soapbox derby turnout

'Build parties' planned in advance of Greenfield, Montague races

By JULIAN MENDOZA
Staff Writer

GREENFIELD — After Greenfield's inaugural soapbox derby turned out a "lower than expected" number of go-kart enthusiasts last year, race organizer Mik Muller is hopeful that a reprisal in May will rev up prospective racers. "The derby is a fun community event for both racers and spectators, and brings in people from as far away as Albany and Pennsylvania," Muller wrote in a press release. "Families, and even businesses, can build carts and test their mettle to win trophies and fame in front of cheering crowds."

Soapbox racing returned to Franklin County in 2021 after an eight-year hiatus, marking the first time since Montague hosted the event in 2013. Consisting of two races in September, the soapbox derby revival saw 16 racers kick into gear in Greenfield before 41 did the same in Turners Falls.

This year's first race will take place in Greenfield on Saturday, May 7, at noon on Nash's Mill Road. The second will be in Turners Falls on Sunday, Sept. 18, at Unity Park. Aside from being a source of entertainment for participants and spectators, Greenfield's race will be a fundraiser, with proceeds from signup fees going to the Greenfield Recreation Department's Fireworks Fund that pays for the fireworks display at Beacon Field in July.

Despite a turnout he said could have been better, Muller saw potential in the amount of interest Greenfield's 2021 race at Nash's Mill Road garnered, particularly considering the circumstances.

"This is an excellent hill, and despite being held the same day as the Franklin County Fair last year, we had a good crowd and some serious racing action," Muller wrote in a press release.

This year, Muller hopes to draw around 25 to 30 racers,

500 to 1,000 spectators and a handful of vendors.

"We would like to see more participation from Greenfield residents," he said. "We had a lot of participants from out of town ... but if we had more Greenfield racers, it would help carry the flag forward for the town for another year."

More participation would also mean more money raised. Last year, according to Muller, he raised "about \$3,500 from the event, with special thanks to primary sponsor Greenfield Savings Bank and all the other sponsors, materials donors and volunteers." This year, Muller is shooting higher.

"We would love to raise \$5,000," he said. "All the money we can raise the better."

Aside from strength in numbers and an increase in proceeds, a larger pool of race participants would make for greater diversity of go-kart designs, he noted. All vehicles must be handmade.

"Carts can be as simple as a three-wheeler bolted to a sheet of plywood or as elaborate as a submarine with an octopus riding on top," Muller wrote in a press release.

This year, there will be a new class of racing for adults. While children and teenagers will still have their regular race to determine the fastest go-kart, adults can now sign up for either a regular adult class or the new "Semi-Pro" adult class, which is intended for racers who consistently place in the top three. Creativity-related prizes will also be awarded.

Two "build parties" are being held in April so that interested participants can get help crafting a go-kart to their liking. One build party will be held behind Greenfield City Hall at Half Pint Homes on Sunday, April 10, at 11 a.m., while the next will be held at Court Square on Saturday, April 30, at 2 p.m.

"It's more than just a 'STEM' project. It's more of a



STAFF FILE PHOTO DAN LITTLE
Ivy Muller takes a ride on her go-kart Poison Ivy with a push from her father, Mik Muller, during a building workshop held in advance of soapbox derbies in Greenfield and Montague last year. Two go-kart "build parties" are being held in April, with the first being behind Greenfield City Hall at Half Pint Homes on Sunday, April 10, at 11 a.m.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO DAVID RAINMILLE
Eventual winner Jim Roberge of Greenfield pulls ahead in the Greenfield Soapbox Derby held on Nash's Mill Road last year. This year's Greenfield race will be held Saturday, May 7, at noon.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO DAVID RAINMILLE
Sixteen competitors participated in the Greenfield Soapbox Derby last year, traveling down Nash's Mill Road. This year's Greenfield race will be held Saturday, May 7, at noon.

'STEAM' project, if you add an A in there for art," Muller said, playing off the acronym for science, technology, engineer-

ing and mathematics.

The racer signup deadline is Saturday, April 30. Registration costs \$30. There will be no

same-day registration this year. Signup forms can be found at greenfieldsoapboxraces.com.

Reach Julian Mendoza at 413-772-0261, ext. 261 or jmendoza@recorder.com.