

Aroostook River Fun Run Canoe and Kayak Race
By Meridith Paterson
Staff Write, The Star-Herald

Some outdoor enthusiasts enjoy leisurely adventures searching for wildlife in the Aroostook wilderness while others harbor a more athletic angle to taking advantage of outdoor sports. Those looking to hone their competitive edge or enjoy a day of sightseeing have the Aroostook River Fun Run Canoe and Kayak 8-mile Challenge to look forward to on Saturday, May 31.

Approximately one year ago, the Presque Isle Rotary Club, a 100-member service club, decided to organize and sponsor a canoe/kayak event to raise funds for a local non-profit organization, as well as promote healthy and safe summer activities for the community.

Members of the PI Rotary Club approached the Rotary Club in Washburn to co-sponsor and assist in the operation and organization of the race. In July 2007, the clubs formed a four-member committee co-chaired by Keith Brown and Mark Putnam and including Gretchen Morse and Charlie Beck. After considering the community non-profits in Aroostook County, the committee chose Wintergreen Art Center as the benefiting group.

The WGAC, located in the Aroostook Centre Mall, strives to enrich the lives of Aroostook County residents by creating a space for artists to teach about their art forms, and for citizens to practice their own creativity. Founded approximately one and a half years ago, WGAC has since served hundreds of children and adults of all ages. The WGAC runs smoothly thanks to the donated time and effort of many volunteers.

According to Lara Cannon, president of WGAC, the funds received from organizations help the center make paid positions. "I am very proud of what we have done, and I hope our organization will grow and continue to be a source of enjoyment for our community," said Cannon. "The nice thing about this donation is that we're going to be able to use it how we want to."

The WGAC board currently plans to use the funds to improve the space and buy more materials for summer camps.

The race day's activities will begin with a light breakfast at Thomas Brewer Park hosted by the Washburn club to energize all participants. The registration starts at 8 a.m. with the race set for 10 a.m. at the Washburn boat landing and ending at the Presque Isle Fish and Game Club.

The race not only offers an opportunity to support a community organization, but also a chance to enjoy the picturesque wilderness formerly marred by pollution at the part of the river near Washburn.

"When I was a kid growing up in Washburn, you did not go near the river unless you had to cross it by means of the bridge," explained Brown. "The river downstream of the Salmon Brook was literally filled with a combination of potatoes, french fries and sewage from the town ... Thirty years can make a big difference when nature and man work together to clean up a polluted mess. I never thought as a kid that I would ever be able to enjoy paddling my kayak down the river from Washburn to Presque Isle, because at that time that was the last place anyone would want to put a kayak. Now, the river presents 10 miles of a tranquil waterway filled with so many islands that you could probably travel the river 10 times and never take the same route twice."

Visitors to the river have seen bear, moose, waterfowl and Brown has spotted an eagle busy with his own fishing at the river bank.

“We’re celebrating our area’s remarkable and scenic asset — the Aroostook River, and of course healthy outdoor fun for the family,” said Putnam. “If the number of vehicles around town sporting boats on their roofs is any indication of interest in the sport, we should have a sizable crowd on race day,” he added.

Rotarians managing the finish line of the race will declare the winners in a variety of categories who will be awarded trophies for their efforts. Prizes, including an Old Town Otter kayak, donated by the clubs and other sponsors will be randomly awarded to event participants. After the award ceremony, paddlers will be offered a light lunch.

The entry fee is \$15 for adults, \$12 for senior citizens and \$10 for youth. The first 100 entrants will receive a free T-shirt. For more information on the race or to register, contact Brown at 455-4717 (krbrown@mfx.net) or Putnam at 764-4471 (editor@nepublish.com) or download a registration form from the PI Rotary Web site www.presqueislerotary.org. Registration forms will also be available at the Star-Herald office on North Street.

Committee members hope for area canoe and kayak rental shops and vendors to advertise to those who are interested in participating but do not have a canoe or kayak.

“Central Aroostook has a recreational opportunity in our backyards for paddling that should be celebrated,” said Brown.