

Spirit of Gasquet Raft Race continues, downsized

June 27, 2020



Large gatherings of people are still not allowed until the state reaches Stage 4 on its road to reopening due to the pandemic.

However, organizers of the Gasquet Raft Race didn't want to give up after their biggest draw ever last year on its 50th anniversary.

"We wanted it to go on and on and on forever. We had to do something," said coordinator Gina Bowen.

Last year the event – a flotilla that meanders 2-1/2 miles down Smith River – drew 339 costumed, amateur sailors in decorated inflatable rafts. The second half of the festivities is usually a community barbeque at the Gasquet American.

To keep the spirit of the event alive this July 11, Bowen has scaled plans back. Rather than a barbecue, participants can purchase a T-shirt for \$25, or \$30 for larger sizes, and receive a free hotdog supplied by Taylor's Sausage. Then they're free to float down the river on their own.

"They'll be safe in the water, as long as they keep their distance," Bowen said. "It should be no problem. I encourage everyone to take any safety measures they're comfortable with."

Bowen said she's ordered 200 T-shirts, 75 masks and 25 hats with this year's slogan, "2020: Year of the Mask."

The T-shirts will be on sale from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the American Legion hall, located at 1555 Gasquet Flat Road. Bowen said to ensure you get one, pre-order by calling 707-954-1836.

"We're totally excited. I've heard people are already making rafts and their masks. All of Gasquet will be there for support," she said.

Bowen added if T-shirts run out, she can special order more and have them to participants within a week.

Jamie Brassard, Gasquet American Legion adjutant, is bittersweet about the scaled-back plans.

"I think it will be good. It's going to be a pick-up-and-go situation. Gina will get to sell her T-shirts and give 'em a hot dog and off they go," Brassard said. "Unfortunately, it will hurt us a little. We'll take in stride like everything else."

She said the American Legion sold over 400 dinners last year at the Gasquet Raft Race, their only fundraiser of the year, which usually nets between \$12,000 to \$15,000.

The money goes to pay the post's bills and insurance, fund scholarships, to send veterans to get treatment at the San Francisco Veterans Administration and to host an annual free dinner for legionnaires, Brassard said.

“We should be all right for this year,” she said. “We passed out a lot of money this year, but a lot was not spent, too. We decided with what’s going on, for purchases like a new stove, to hold off another year.”

As tough as a smaller turnout might be for the Gasquet American Legion, Brussard couldn’t help but wish success for Bowen, now in her 10th year organizing the event.

“I hope she gets a lot of people to buy those shirts. Gina works so hard every year on this. We can’t thank her enough,” Brussard said.

To learn more about the race, go to www.Gasquetrafttrace.com or Gasquet Raft Race on Facebook.