

If the boat floats, row it – but make it quick

By Molly Murray
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Steven Meade got the memo from his boss by email. It sounded pretty interesting – build a boat from cardboard, row it a short distance in the Blades Marina and bring bragging rights, honor and a trophy back to I.G. Burton, a Seaford car dealership.

But things didn't work out exactly as planned for Meade, who ended up being a construction team of one after others bailed out. And to say he got a late start was no exaggeration.

"9:45-10 p.m. Friday night," he said. "I was going to make it look like a Corvette. It failed."

Meade and I.G. Burton were destined for a Saturday regatta featured as part of the "Reclaim Our River" Nanticoke Series program, which brings monthly events, workshops and activities to the watershed. The idea is to raise awareness about issues facing the river and help area residents connect with the resource.

The issue facing Meade was he had ended up with a solid cardboard boat that resembled a hunter's Jon Boat. Lessons abounded along the wharf, many ramming home the wisdom that, when making cardboard boats, it is best to think again about the solid cardboard.

It may be sturdy when dry. But once wet, what is pretty heavy to begin with becomes as non-buoyant as a Chevy Suburban, which Meade would probably be willing to sell you. The 21-year-old is in sales.

A walk a ways down the marina Saturday brought you to the CV (for cardboard vessel) Deadline, built by Robbie Westhoff and his dad, Jim, a former newspaper reporter who now works for DelDOT.

The Westhoff boat-building venture was also a last-minute affair, commencing late Friday night and ending Saturday afternoon with a heavy helping of duct tape.

"That's part of the adventure – doing it in 12 hours," Jim Westhoff, of Greenwood, said.

And then, there was the Reale family, of Laurel.

Dad Jason is a corporate project engineer and he took his cardboard boat construction seriously – so seriously he crafted some very cool, hollow cardboard 2-by-4s that he used in the framing of the Viking-style vessel.

The boat was not only beautiful – it won the Most Whimsical Award – and fast, but also very seaworthy. He, his wife Wendy, and daughter Monica, 8, even made Viking hats – from cardboard.

"We started about two weeks ago," he said.

By Saturday, he said, "I was so tired of working with cardboard."

High school friends Tyler Imprescia and Sean Letavish, both 14 and from the Dover area, used a coffin as the inspiration for their boat design.

They waterproofed the bottom with spray paint once they reached the Blades regatta location.

That was when the "you go first syndrome" infected the team. Imprescia said that Letavish would get in the boat first once it was in the water.

"We'll see if it holds him, and if it holds him then I'll go in," he said.

The event, held for the first time on Saturday, drew nine cardboard boats, some made by families like the Reales, others by community organizations and still others by local businesses.

The Aaron's Ace Hardware boat, for instance, had the fastest course time. But it was built for speed and not longevity so in the three-way paddle off for Pride of the



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The crew from Trapp Pond State Park bursts into an early lead with the 'Molly Brown' just beginning to move during the Cardboard Boat regatta held Saturday at Nanticoke River Public Marine Park in Blades. The colorful Trap Pond boat won an award as best decorated.



Six-year-old Delaney Westhoff tries to alert her brother Robbie to trouble a little more than halfway through the course. He paid more attention later when they both abandoned ship.



Jason Reale, of Laurel, and his daughter Monica, 8, jump into the lead at the start of a race against 'Deadline,' powered by Robbie Westhoff and his sister, Delaney, 6, of Seaford.

Fleet Award, the white vessel took on water, buckled in the center and sank not too far from the starting line.

The event was put on by the Delaware Nature Society's Abbott's Mill Nature Center, in conjunction with the DNREC Division of Watershed Stewardship, the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, the Nanticoke River Sail & Power Squadron, the Nanticoke River Yacht Club, the Nanticoke River Arts Council and the Nanticoke River Marina.

The Reclaim Our River series "is to promote the river both as an ecological treasure that can be enjoyed in a variety of ways – out on the water or hiking on some of the trails near it – to some of the environmental concerns

and some of the things we can all do to clean up the river," said Jason Beale, with the Nature Society. "And of course we want to bring the community together."

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