

Summer fun starts every year with Boatnik

By Patti Richter
of the Daily Courier

Boatnik is often what many consider the kickoff to summer fun in Josephine County. Each year the Active Club sponsors the festival, which runs mostly out of Riverside Park, that features boat racing, carnival rides, vendor booths and a parade through downtown. Proceeds from the event benefit area children through scholarships, help with medical care and other programs.

This year's 52nd annual celebration will again be Memorial Day weekend, starting May 26 and running through May 30.

"This is our one and only fundraiser for the year," said Rick Chapman, a longtime Active Club member. "The community really appreciates what we do. The sponsors — from those who do the \$100 T-shirts to the big sponsors — know they are getting a good bang for their buck. They know that all the money we raise is going to a good cause and to help our kids."

Boatnik began in 1959 when motel owner Reuben Garcia came up with the idea of a power boat race on the Rogue River. It was named after the Sputnik satellite launched by the Soviets a couple of years earlier. Credit for the name goes to Larry Aschenbrenner, an Active Club member. According to the event's history, Garcia and Jerry Briggs, a river guide and boat builder, each put up \$500 to pay for the race if it wasn't a success. But they didn't need to worry. The sight of the boats cutting through the Rogue River's waters has always brought out large crowds.

In the first year, Garcia's 18-year-old son Grant won the race, a 50-mile round trip to Galice and back, with George Brown on board. They ran two people in the boats for a while before switching to just the driver.

Grants Pass racers from the 1970s and '80s, Don Burnison and Jeff



FILE/Daily Courier

Boat racing has been a part of all 52 years of the Boatnik.

Lewis, both hold the record for most wins with eight each.

Chapman was recruited to join the club in the mid-1970s while he was running Plaza Sewing and Quilt Center, which was on G Street at the time. He bought the business in 1977.

He enjoys the challenge of raising money for local children and helping to make the community better. One of the group's largest accomplishments is paying for the playground equipment at Reinhart Volunteer Park several years ago. They also help support the local Boys and Girls Club, Special Olympics, the YMCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and 4-H clubs. The Active Club also helps out each of the drug- and alcohol-free graduation parties, talented-and-gifted programs and River City BMX.

"It's great to see all the different kids that really benefit from the money we raise," Chapman added.

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