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Cardboard Boat Race Tests Freshman Engineers

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Freshmen students majoring in engineering, as well as students from various academic departments at Cedarville University, are preparing for the 26th annual cardboard canoe boat race on Friday, Oct 4. The event begins at 3 p.m. on Cedar Lake on campus.

The cardboard canoe race is one of the signature events of Cedarville's Homecoming and Parents Weekend. There are 38 engineering teams registered for this year's competition — the most in the history of the race. Each team consists of four students, two of whom must paddle from one end of the lake to the other without sinking.

The cardboard canoe race will be [livestreamed](#) on the Homecoming and Parents Weekend webpage.

Student teams construct their canoes out of cardboard and tape. This activity is a class assignment for the engineering students, where their grade is based on their success — or lack thereof — in moving across the lake.

The canoe race originated from an idea presented by Dr. Larry Zavodney, senior professor of mechanical engineering, and former electrical engineering professor Dr. Sam SanGregory. They received cardboard from a local mill and worked together to create a boat that could float in a pool. After being certain the cardboard and tape were capable of creating a viable boat, the professors decided to make it an assignment for engineering students.

"The canoe race is very important to Cedarville's engineering program," said Dr. Robert Chasnov, dean of the school of engineering and computer science. "In the past, many large engineering schools did not focus on the hands-on projects for undergraduate engineering students. We wanted to define a clear distinction between our program and those at other institutions. As a result, the cardboard canoe race competition was developed."

Freshmen engineering majors are taught how to use a particular software that helps them determine how much water a boat will displace given the weight of two people. This software, as well as the experience of an upperclassman advisor, gives students a head start on success.

"My favorite part of the boat races is actually seeing a well-made boat quickly come across the lake," said Chasnov. "Freshmen are given enough advice to make a boat that doesn't sink, but it's the boatmanship of students that sets the teams apart."

The cardboard canoe races are the first opportunity for freshmen to work as part of a team. This allows them to develop teamwork skills that will be an important part of their job in the future, noted Chasnov. The second lesson for freshmen is learning in a practical way that the laws of physics really do work.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,380 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.