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## Sun-powered voyage

Tuesday, May 25, 2004

**By Nancy Buczek**  
Staff writer

A solar-powered boat built by four State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry students was expected to make its debut today, less than a month before the team vies for the world championship in a solar/electric boat competition.

"Realistically speaking, we're really happy that we'll just be there," said former ESF student James Dumpert, who spearheaded the college's involvement in the competition. "Optimistically, we really want to place up in first, second or third."

The 16-foot, approximately 45-pound fiberglass boat has been in the works for almost two years and will be entered into the 11th annual Solar Splash competition on Hoyt Lake in Buffalo June 16 to 20.

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The competition, open to high school and college students, is supported by Advanced Energy Competitions, a nonprofit company funded by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers Division of Solar Energy. Participants compete for about 50 awards, including overall best competitor, sportsmanship and hottest-looking boat. The prizes aren't monetary.

The ESF team members, all seniors in the last academic year, are: Dumpert, of Kenmore near Buffalo; Gary Fontaine, of Utica; Deborah Ketola, of Syracuse; and David Smith, of Baltimore. Their boat will have to beat an expected 25 teams in sprint and maneuverability events and the solar slalom to gain the world title.

Today, the single-passenger boat was to travel about 5 mph on about a 12-mile trip via the Oneida and Oswego rivers from Winter Harbor Marina in Brewerton to Gatherings By Design in Phoenix. A rain date of Thursday was set.

However, the area from Three Rivers to Oswego, which includes part of the journey to Phoenix, was closed Monday by the state because of high water. Boating is not expected to resume until water levels have receded.

Dumpert could not be reached for comment Monday night about how the closing would affect the trip.

He and the three other students are calling the event the "Mules to Joules Tour," to highlight how technology has advanced. Historically, mules or horses were attached to canalboats by ropes and walked beside the canal on a dirt towpath, pulling the boats. Now a boat can be powered by the sun's energy. Joule is the name for a basic unit of energy.

Dumpert was hooked when he saw the Solar Splash event in Buffalo two years ago. "I thought it would be a really cool idea for an environmental college such as ESF to compete," he said.


The ESF boat will be powered by energy harvested from the sun by photovoltaic panels. The four panels, which are about 2 by 3 feet each, charge a battery, which powers a motor-driven propeller.

The ESF team has two props for its boat, one for the endurance event and one for the sprint competition. The boat can reach speeds of about 15 to 20 mph with the endurance prop and about 30 mph with the sprint prop.

The four students spent about 12 hours each week at the marina working on the boat. They were also carrying full course loads and doing other work to prepare for the competition, such as getting donations for the project.

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