

CITY/REGION

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Boat festival hottest yet

By GERALD GAUTHIER

Lethbridge Herald

The consensus is this year's Rotary Dragon Boat Festival kicked some serious dragon butt.

Participants and organizers alike gave the second annual festival an enthusiastic thumbs up as the three-day event wound down Sunday afternoon at Henderson Lake Park.

"It couldn't have been better. The camaraderie between the teams was just fantastic," said Frankie Poulain, a paddler with Sistership, the Calgary dragon boat team that finished second in the women's final earlier in the day.

"It has been absolutely fantastic," gushed Sistership teammate Heather Webber.

She raved about the efforts of local volunteers who supplied visiting paddlers with numerous warm touches such as fresh-baked muffins each morning as well as sunscreen and bug spray for later in the day.

Six visiting teams from Calgary and Edmonton competed along with 20 Lethbridge-area teams in four mixed divisions as well as special divisions for all-women teams and breast cancer survivors.

"It's going to get better and bigger every year," said Diane Randell, vice chairman of the festival committee.

She's also a member of Abreast of 'Bridge, the team of local breast cancer survivors who formed Lethbridge's first dragon boat paddling team.

"The fact we can put our paddles in the water makes us winners and we're thankful for that," Randell said.

Closing ceremonies got under way with an emotional breast cancer awareness dedication in which participants stood on the shore and cast rose petals onto the lake in memory of women who had lost the battle with breast cancer.

Afterward, medals were handed out. Breast Friends, an Edmonton team won the women's final which saw Lethbridge entry Drag 'n Puff finish third.

Drag 'r Butz, a City of Lethbridge team, won the Mixed A division, and Topmade Dragoneers was the best of three Calgary teams which swept the top three spots in the Invitational division.

The Regent Tsunami of Lethbridge won the Mixed B event while top spot in the Mixed C division went to Membership, the 1st Choice Credit Union team. The Lethbridge Herald Headliners got bogged down in weeds in their first race Sunday, but rebounded strongly to win the Mixed D division.

Any questions? Contact the writer at gerald.gauthier@lethbridgeherald.com

HERALD PHOTO BY IAN MARTENS

Wendy McLeish of team Sistership goes under the paddles of fellow paddlers following the Breast Cancer Challenge Cup during the Rotary Dragon Boat Festival at Henderson Sunday.