

frontlines

Staff accomplishments

Dragon boat champion navigates clippers, too

Gold-medal rower enjoys salon work at Rockyview

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Communications

PAT SMITH is handy with a pair of scissors. And with oars, she's a champion.

Smith, who has worked at the Rockyview General Hospital hair salon for the past 23 years, and her local dragon boat team paddled to first-place finishes last month at events at Lake Minnewanka, as well as in Cape Breton and Halifax.

But winning gold isn't the main motivation for Smith or her teammates, all of whom are breast cancer survivors.

"We do it to stay healthy as breast cancer survivors," says Smith.

"We paddle to show there is life after cancer."

The team trains twice a week at the Glenmore Reservoir.

Propelling the long narrow boat with 19 other paddlers, all sitting side by side, is not easy. Smith says it requires year-round workouts and significant upper-body strength.

The commitment has paid off. Just 18 months ago, she was a member of the Canadian team that finished sixth in Singapore at the world championships for breast cancer survivors.

Smith says a client at the RGH hair salon introduced her to dragon boat racing about six years ago.

"I found out he managed a dragon boat racing team and I'd always been fascinated," Smith recalls.

She joined his team and was hooked.

Smith points out her love for dragon boating is matched by her passion for styling hair at Rockyview.

"I just love them," Smith says of her clients.

"I like making them feel good and look good. It's so rewarding."

Many of her clients are seniors, who have to stay in the hospital for long periods of time, so having their hair done is a much-appreciated luxury.

In fact, some clients return to sit in Smith's chair, even after being discharged from hospital.

Marta Perez, 83, was a patient at Rockyview three years ago yet, on this day, she's back at the hospital to have her hair styled.

Once Smith is done, Marta leaves the salon with a huge smile on her face.

"Pat does such a good job and she's so patient," says Silvia Perez, Marta's daughter.

"We keep coming back."

Smith says the best part of her job is being with customers like Marta.

"Hairdressing picked me; I never picked it," says Smith.

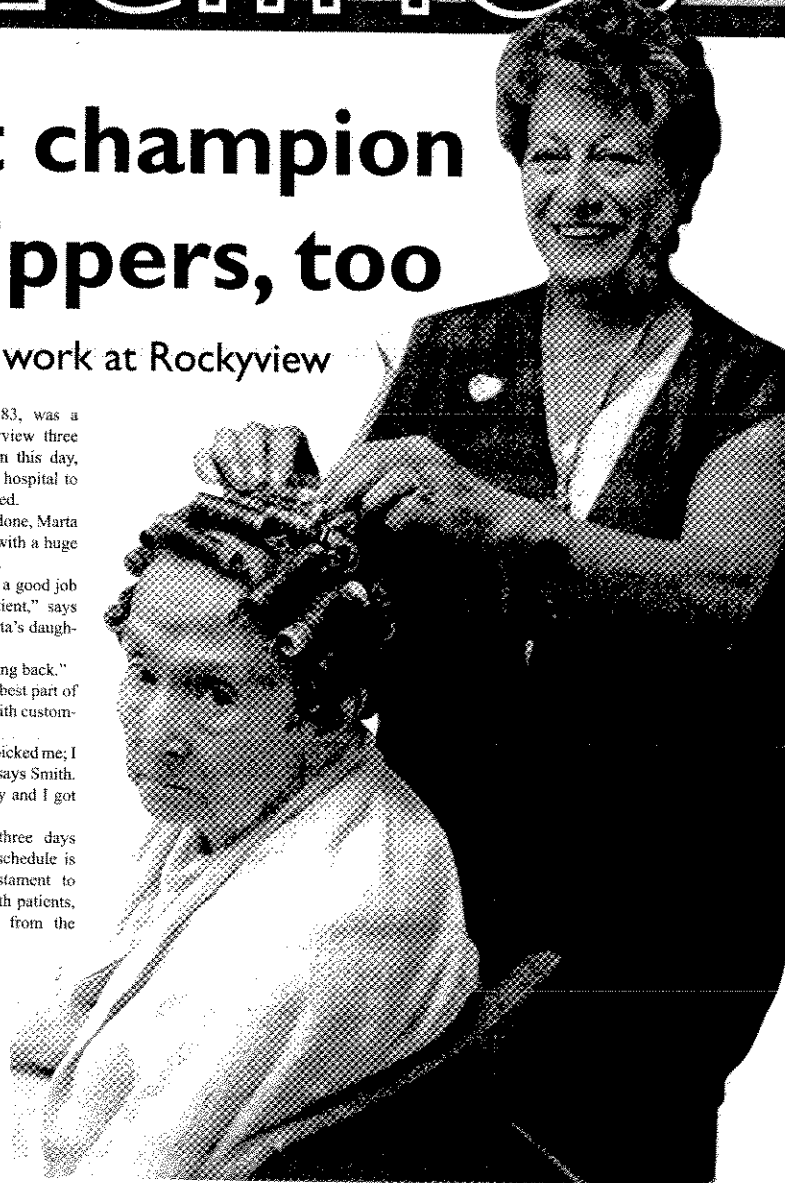
"It was a hobby and I got hooked."

Smith works three days a week and her schedule is packed — a testament to her popularity with patients, staff and clients from the community.

About paddling, Smith says her main goal is to stay healthy and keep fit.

And hairdressing?

"The clients leave with such a smile on their face," Smith says. "That's my reward." ■



AMBER GOULARD/Photo

Former Rockyview patient Marta Perez returns to the hospital to have her hair done by Pat Smith, who's been a stylist here for the past 23 years. When she's not cutting hair, Smith is a competitive dragon boat racer.