

Dragonboats multiply

■ **More than 110 entries for weekend races at Waterfront park in Kelowna**

By Okanagan Saturday Staff

Numbers are up for this year's Dragon Boat Festival. Way up.

So much in fact, organizers were forced to turn away six entries for lack of boats after 110 entries committed to the third annual event at Waterfront Park in Kelowna. All told, there are 88 mixed teams and 22 women's teams. The festival, which features 85 crews from across Western Canada and the Pacific Northwest plus 35 local entries, got under way Friday and wraps up Sunday evening with a closing ceremony at 5 p.m.

In its inaugural showing, Kelowna's festival had 72 boats. That was followed up by 99 last year.

"Every year, we've had an increase. And now we're the second largest (dragon boat) festival in Western Canada that we're aware of," said festival spokesperson Dan Giesbrecht, stating only Toronto and Vancouver are ahead of Kelowna in terms of numbers.

"Unfortunately, we had a waiting list and had cut off and deny some teams because of the amount of boats we had. So next year, we're going to build more boats.

"We want to try and make it bigger and better every year."

Admission to the weekend-long celebration at Waterfront Park is free. Racing starts today and tomorrow at 8 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m.

"People are more than welcome to attend and cheer boats on," said Giesbrecht, noting the public can also take in a multi-cultural food court, beverage garden and entertainment stage.

As for the scores of boats to cheer on, how about these two: the Sonar Dragons from CNIB; and the Survivorship from Penticton, a group of women who have survived breast cancer.

Running the event, as usual, is Foundations 2000, a non-profit organization involved all throughout the Okanagan.

"An event like this benefits Kelowna and the area," said Giesbrecht. "And we take pride in doing that."

Members of the Sistership team from Calgary head out onto the water from Tugboat Bay beach in the Waterfront Park on Friday during a practice run for the Dragon Boat festival which runs through out the week-end.



GARY NYLANDER/The Okanagan Saturday