

100
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Support from the YMCA is invaluable

by Leanne Dohy

The dragon head that sits next to Lorraine Fallis has both a meaning and a message for her and fellow members of the Sistership dragon-boat team. "We're out to promote awareness that there is life after breast cancer," says the longtime YMCA member and volunteer.

With the support of the YMCA, her team trains year-round for the annual summer dragon-boat races, despite a winter not conducive to water-sport training. "YMCA Calgary has just been tremendous in their support, says Fallis.

"They offer us the use of their facility to train. During off-season, we sit at poolside and practise paddling. We also have a weight-training program, as well as cardiovascular workouts. The races are quite strenuous, you can't just show up on race day and think you're ready to go."

Diagnosed with breast cancer three years ago, Fallis dove immediately into the dragon-boat world, where teams compete and promote fitness awareness to breast cancer survivors.

"I got into it right away," she says. I was actually in chemotherapy when I was approached by Sistership to start the third paddling team. I was fine during my treatments, so I decided to give it a shot.

"I've been active all my life. I've been teaching swimming now for over 25 years and fitness is just a way of life for me. And it was really nice to have the support group. We all have one thing in common — breast cancer — so it was as much for that support as to stay active. It was really nice for me, because if I had a question about treatment, I had 24 teammate answers right there. You don't get that kind of support anywhere else."

Fallis' relationship with the YMCA goes back a long way. "I've been associated with the Y for over 25 years — as a swim instructor and a lifeguard — between here in Calgary and back in Montreal, which is where I'm from," she says.

"When I was diagnosed, it was important for me to continue my relationship with the Y. It was a bonus that the Sistership team trained there. The YMCA has been absolutely wonderful to us. I love talking about it, because it's just

such a great sense of community between us, between the YMCA and the Sistership. The sense of camaraderie is just wonderful."

Mary-Lea Crawford, communications manager for the YMCA, says that relationship is one expression of the YMCA living its mission statement. "We facilitate and promote people's individual development by helping them grow spiritually, mentally, physically and socially," she says.

"It's part of our mission to foster a sense of responsibility in the community. Our partnership with the Sistership dragon-boat teams gives us the chance to touch the lives of each woman on the team; and ultimately support them as a team to get their message — that there's life after breast cancer — out to the community. It's relationships like these that help us build a

■ To find our more about the Sistership organization visit www.sistershipcalgary.com stronger, healthier community." 



Lorraine Fallis, Sistership member.