

Hundreds hit Glenmore Reservoir for annual Calgary Dragon Boat Race and Festival

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Breast Cancer survivors and women still undergoing treatment belonging to the Sistership Dragon Boat Association hug each other after a ceremony to salute those who are no longer with us and those fighting the disease on the dock of the annual Dragon Boat Race and Festival at North Glenmore Park in SW Calgary, Alta. on Saturday August 22, 2015. Stuart Dryden/Calgary Sun/Postmedia Network

It's all about team spirit at the Calgary Dragon Boat Race and Festival.

Fifty-four teams, with crews between 22 and 25 rowers per boat, filled North Glenmore Park over the weekend.

The key to making it across the finish line at a good speed is being in tune with your teammates, said Joe Connelly, co-chairman of the festival.

"You really do have to work as a team," he said.

"If you're not paddling in-sync then you're not getting maximum effort out the dragon boat."

The festival and race ran Sunday and Saturday at the park.

Dragon boater Jodie Jeworski, 33, was racing with her team the Wave Runner on Sunday.

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"There's a lot of long-term experience (on the team)," she said.

"We have people from Year 1 to Year 20 on our team — lots of us are in that middle range.

"There's a lot of people who start and stick with it — it's like a little community."

For 27 years, although not consecutively, people have come in the hundreds and sometimes thousands to either participate or watch the magnificent boats glide across the Glenmore Reservoir.

"It stopped for a couple years because people just lost favour, but it's back now, and it's back with a vengeance," said Connelly.

He said they expected anywhere between 2,000 and 4,000 came out to watch and participate this year, boosted by the sunny weather.

"We order that special ever year," Connelly said.

He also said the sport is very popular with breast cancer survivors.

"For many years, when women got breast cancer they were told that they should just sit at home and recuperate," said Connelly.

"And then when they found that when women actually got into rowing they recovered better — they recovered faster from breast cancer."

There were many survivor ships at the event Sunday, including one called the Sistership.

The sport builds upper body strength, evident in the quick and clean cuts paddles make when they hit the water.

"With 22 people pulling, you're moving quite quick, you're moving at a good clip," he said.

Connelly said anyone is welcome to join a team, even those who have never tried it before.

"We try to match up individuals ... with dragon boat teams that are looking for people — so we try to do a little matchmaker service," he said.

For more information visit calgarydragonboatsociety.com

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Street View