

# The Breast Quest Dragon Boat Team

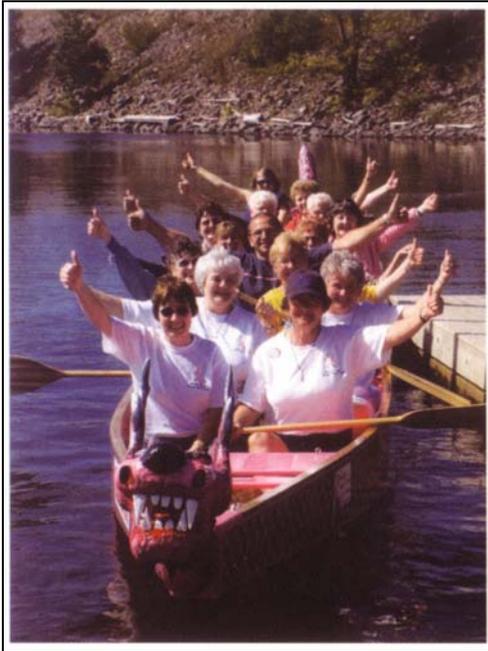
by Fred Lawrence

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**M**any people have heard of the Loch Ness Monster, but Lake Pisiquid, at Windsor, N.S., now has a dragon!

Breast Quest Dragon Boat Team has received funding from the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation - Atlantic Chapter's Community Health Grant Program, to purchase a dragon boat. It's a full size boat, 40 feet in length with an additional 8 feet of "head and tail".

This month in Hants County The Breast Quest Society has launched their version of an ancient tradition - their own Dragon Boat.



The Chinese Dragon Boat Festival is one of that country's most ancient traditions. The festival pays tribute to the attempts to rescue patriotic poet Chu Yuan who drowned in 277 BC on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. It is also

a time for using special herbs and plants to ward off evil and disease for the next year, and to remind family members to take care of their health.

The sturdy boat is built for 22 paddlers, a Cox, and a drummer (according to Chinese tradition, the paddlers row to a beat). In Canada, the Dragon Boat idea began on the West Coast, and the boat has become a symbolic talisman in the battle against breast cancer. "June marked 10 years these boats have

been used to raise awareness of Breast Cancer," said Pat Westlake, a Breast Cancer survivor and member of the Society.

Westlake said the idea to use the Dragon Boat as the symbol for Breast Cancer Research is "purely Canadian." Paddling brings more good news, she explains. "A Doctor in Vancouver got together with a group of Breast Cancer ladies who had been paddling, and he thought it was an extremely good exercise for survivors of Breast Cancer." The exercise helps survivors feel better not only physically, but also mentally. Seeing the boat afloat for the first time Westlake said, "it took nine months to build - just like having a baby, and that's our baby right there." Clearly emotional, she confessed, "When I saw that boat I didn't know whether to laugh or cry - all of our hard work finally paid off, it's an awesome feeling."

When Westlake was diagnosed with Breast Cancer four years ago she made up her mind to beat the disease, "I've got a lot of living to do and I'm just not ready to go yet - this project has given me a whole new lease on life." She

retains her positive attitude, "It's not going to get me," she stated firmly, "I have fantastic support from my family and friends."

The vibrant 60 year old said the fight is especially hard when a fellow member passes away, "one week you are practicing and the next you are at the funeral home, and that is hard to deal with. For those reasons you have to make the best of every day and try to encourage your fellow sisters to do the same."

The Dragon Boat will give a lot of cancer victims a chance to paddle their way to better health and be able to talk to each other about their common experiences. "It felt so good to be with people who knew what you were thinking and feeling because people don't really know unless they have had it. We want a cure for cancer and to be able to help those who have it."

The boat was the brainchild of a group of five executive members, Westlake explained. "We started meeting last January once a week to talk and organize, and have been very busy all summer with fund raising." Westlake said area businesses were unaware what the boat will mean for the Cancer Society, but one came through in spades. "If it wasn't for Central Supplies (Windsor), we wouldn't have the boat, they were extremely helpful in many ways." The Breast Cancer Society also recognizes their other donors - the Municipality of West Hants and the Town of Windsor.

The budget for the boat was \$25,000, but the group is still \$5,000 short to purchase life jackets and the ceremonial

drum. "We are hoping to raise enough funds soon so we can at least take it out for a paddle - it's like having a brand new car in the yard but having no insurance so you can't drive it."

Westlake said, "We can live without team jackets - but not life jackets."

Westlake's sister-in-law made the t-shirts for the executive, "but we would like to have one for each member so we have a lot of work yet to do."

The boat was built in Petite Riviere, N.S. by Scott Dagley and will be used throughout the province during special

events to raise awareness for Breast Cancer. Dagley is also a survivor of cancer, "He took the project very personally and was very patient with us," Westlake said. "He did a tremendous job and gave us a really good deal."

Further events will bring fleets of boats from Ontario to Lake Banook, Dartmouth, N.S. for competitions. "But the boat will stay here permanently and hopefully we will be able to practice three times a week."

Becoming a member of the Society comes with a high price. "You must be a cancer survivor. But we want everyone afflicted in the Valley to join our team for the support. We're all in the same boat, and the camaraderie is amazing - it is a lot of fun. Together we can find a cure - I know it."

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