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Awakening of dragon boats kicks off Portland Rose Festival racing season

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39/39





Dragon boats Awakened for Rose Festival



By [Grant Butler | The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Thanks to "How to Train Your Dragon," "The Hobbit" and "Game of Thrones," dragons have become pop-culture stars the last few years. But for fans of the [Portland Rose Festival](#), the only dragons that matter are the ones that ply the waters of the Willamette River each spring.

Saturday afternoon, the [Rose Festival Dragon Boat Race](#) season kicked off with an "awakening" ceremony at Riverplace Marina, featuring Buddhist prayers, lion dancing, firecrackers, and a water cannon salute from the Portland Fireboat.



Unlike some years, the weather cooperated, with patchy sun and just a few scattered raindrops. A bit of wind provided the only significant challenge for the racers as they took the eight colorfully painted boats out for the first time this year.

"The water was fine today, but it was a little fast -- it was pushing us," said Sam Crosthwait, who leads the Night Fury racing team, and has been participating in the dragon boat races for six years. "Our boats act like they have sails on both ends, and wind tends to spin us. But it was definitely better than last year, when it was rainy and we almost crashed into the Hawthorne Bridge."

Before the boats cast off, Buddhists from West Linn's Hui Lin Temple offered sung prayers, and local and international dignitaries spoke about how the dragon boats continue to be an important symbol of the sister city relationship between [Portland and Kaohsiung, Taiwan](#).

"Portland delights in the broad diversity and cultural traditions that are celebrated here, but I think this might be the ultimate sister city tradition," said Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick. "Dragon boating is a feature of the culture of Kaohsiung, which has become thoroughly integrated into the culture of Portland."

Andy Chin, the director general of the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office in Seattle, noted that cultural cross-pollination goes both ways.

"One of the grand dames of Portland, [Voodoo Doughnuts, has opened up in Taiwan](#)," he said to applause. "Can you believe it?"

After a percussive performance by the [Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association Lion Dance Team](#), the Buddhists led a processional down to the docks, where dots of fiery red paint were applied to the faces of the boats, which then circled the river three times before docking.

Expect to see the dragon boats out on the water a lot between now and early June. Sixty teams with more than 1,500 participants will practice three times a week to get ready for the races, which happen on June 7-8. That's a lot of paddles hitting the water.

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