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# Annual dragon boat race bonds cultures, survivors

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2015 Dragon Boat Races



By [Tara Kulash](#) | [The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Portland dragon boat racers may be in competition, but they're also a community.

More than 60 teams competed Saturday and Sunday in the dragon boat races on the Willamette River near downtown. The event, in its 26th year, is part of Portland's annual Rose Festival and stems from the city's sisterhood with Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Tom Crowder, race director, said the mission of the Portland-Kaohsiung Sister City Association is to spread cultural awareness, and he believes dragon boat racing helps to provide that sense of community.

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Crowder has been race director for 12 years. He began dragon boat racing with his wife about 20 years ago, he said, and the two have traveled at home and abroad for tournaments.

"I like the team effort," he said. "All paddlers have to be in exact time with each other, and there's a lot of camaraderie."

Crowder's not the only one who feels that way.

One team from Vancouver, B.C., comprised people with a passion for kidney health. Nephrologists, dietitians, nurses, kidney donors and transplant recipients joined to enjoy a sport together. The team is called O2P because patients with kidney failure can no longer urinate.

Gilbert Chan, team captain, said the team raises money for a program called Paddle to Wellness, which gets kidney patients active and boating.

Chan said it's easy to bring people together for dragon boating because it's accessible and inclusive.

"You can have experienced paddlers and newbies that come on a boat and right away start having fun together," he said.

Some groups were so big they had to break into two teams. One of those, Pink Phoenix, was the first team in the nation composed solely of breast cancer survivors.

The group, which has been around for 17 years, had paddles, hats and life jackets all in pink.

Paddler Sue Best, a nine-year survivor from Portland, said one woman approached Pink Phoenix at the race and thanked the team, saying it gave her hope for her mother's breast cancer treatment.

Best, 62, said that's why the team comes out, to give others - and each other - hope.

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Like many, she used the word community when describing her teammates.

"We've been literally and figuratively in the same boat."

To see who won the races Saturday and Sunday, [click here](#).

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