



Media for Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival

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Ancient Tradition

The origin of dragon boat racing can be traced to events that took place in southern China over 2,000 years ago. Dragon boat racing, within the context of a festival, became much more important in Chinese culture with the tragic events surrounding Qu Yuan (pronounced Chu Yuan) around 277 B.C.

Qu Yuan was a statesman and poet who provided truthful advice to the King which angered his political rivals and they persuaded the King to banish him. Despondent over his exile, Qu put stones in his pocket and drowned himself in the Mi Lo River. When local fishermen raced out to rescue him, they beat their drums and splashed with their paddles to scare the fish and water dragons from Qu Yuan.

To commemorate their beloved Qu Yuan, the people of southern China staged dragon boat races to remember the day when they raced into the river in an attempt to save him. From this point on, dragon boat races became an annual event. Preceding the actual races, some festivals still practice the ancient ritual of "Awakening the Dragon." which gives the boats and their crews the strength of the dragon.

The Modern Version

Donald Chisholm McKenzie, a Canadian sports medicine specialist at UBC, wrote a 1998 paper in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* describing how in 1996 he started a dragon boat team for women with a history of breast cancer and believed that this activity would benefit breast cancer survivors as it provided strenuous upper body activity in an aesthetically pleasing and socially supportive environment.

The Birth of the Nanaimo Festival

The Save on Foods Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival began as a grassroots, community supported event in 2003, focused on raising funds for imaging equipment to assist in the early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer at. This initial commitment has continued and grown as the Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival Society donates the net proceeds to the Nanaimo Hospital Foundation and the Nanaimo Community Hospice Society to assist in improving the treatment and care of breast cancer patients.

Features

- Free Admission
- A non-profit, family friendly Festival at Maffeo Sutton Park
- 70+ paddling teams (1600+ paddlers) from across North America
- Friday Candles of Courage - evening candlelight tribute to cancer survivors and victims'
- Saturday - Opening Ceremony with Snuneymuxw First Nation blessing of the boats
- Sunday - Breast Cancer Survivor Challenge and traditional Carnation Ceremony
- Live multi-cultural entertainment throughout the Festival venue
- Food trucks featuring international cuisine
- Exhibitors and great shopping opportunities
- Free downtown parking with bike and handicap parking available on site
- Longwood Brewery beer garden – the best on the West Coast race circuit!

The Festival

- The Save On Foods Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival was founded in 2003 and attracts 70-80 teams with 25 paddlers plus supporters per team
- Nanaimo's largest Festival, it provides an annual economic benefit to our community of more than 1.2 million dollars
- The Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival Society has contributed over \$600,000 to purchase local hospital diagnostic equipment and assist local Hospice society
- New race every 8 minutes throughout race days on Saturday and Sunday
- More than 10,000 attendees over 3 days
- More than 100 volunteers are instrumental in staging the Festival

Dragon Boating

- Part of a larger Chinese cultural tradition that dates back 2,400 years
- A Dragon Boat is a slim 44' racer with a dragon's head at the bow and a tail at the stern
- Each Dragon Boat holds 20 paddlers, a drummer and a steersperson
- Dragon Boat racing is widely used internationally as a corporate team builder
- The average paddler is a middle aged, educated and affluent professional
- Dragon Boat racing is one of the fastest growing international team sports in the world

2017 Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival Society Board Members:

- Heiko Behn, Ian Niamath, Jan Harding, Leslie Sutton,
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