



## **Save On Foods Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival Background**

### **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 in the feudal kingdom and as a man of wisdom and integrity, he provided truthful advice to the King. This advice angered his political rivals and as a result, they persuaded the King to banish him. Despondent over his exile and the subsequent decline of the government, 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 away from Qu Yuan's body.

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." An eye-dotting ceremony awakens the dragon and brings out its fire, which gives the boats and their crews the strength of the dragon.

### **The Modern Version**

Competition has taken place annually for more than 20 centuries as part of folk ritual but the modern version actually emerged as an international sport in Hong Kong in 1976. For competition events, dragon boats are generally rigged with decorative Chinese dragon heads and tails. At other times the decorative regalia is usually removed, although the drum often remains aboard for training purposes. In some areas of China, the boats are raced without dragon adornments.

### **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 our local hospital. This initial commitment has continued and grown as the Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival Society donates 100% of the net proceeds to the Nanaimo Hospital Foundation to assist in improving the diagnostic-treatment process of breast cancer patients.

**Festival Dates:** Friday, July 9<sup>th</sup> | Saturday, July 10<sup>th</sup> | Sunday, July 11<sup>th</sup>

**Location:** Maffeo Sutton Park, Nanaimo, BC

**Charity of Choice:** Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation

## **Features**

- Free Admission
- A non-profit, family friendly Festival
- 100 paddling teams (2500 paddlers) from across North America
- Candles of Courage - Friday evening candlelight tribute to cancer survivors and victims
- Sunday Breast Cancer Survivor Challenge and traditional Carnation Ceremony
- Live entertainment throughout the Festival venue
- Children's Activities (Arts and crafts, activities, entertainment, etc.)
- Food Vendors, featuring international cuisine
- Exhibitions and great shopping opportunities
- Free downtown parking, with bike parking available on site
- Labatt's Beer Garden – the best on the West Coast race circuit!

## **The Festival**

- The Save On Foods Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival was founded in 2003
- The organization of the first Festival was led by Alex Marriott
- Teams participating in 2009: 76
- Now Nanaimo's largest Festival, providing an annual economic benefit to our community of more than 1.2 million dollars
- The Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival Society has contributed more than \$300,000 to purchase diagnostic equipment for our local hospital
- New race every 8 minutes throughout race days on Saturday and Sunday
- More than 25,000 attendees over 3 days
- More than 200 volunteers are instrumental in staging the Festival

## **Dragon Boating**

- Part of a larger Chinese cultural tradition that goes 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 building component for many large organizations
- 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

**Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festival Society Board Members:**

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