

Everyone wins at dragon boat races Fifty teams paddle to fight kids' cancer

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By Sean Moore



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Members of team Shelter Stroke or Swim from Shelter Canadian Properties celebrate victory in one of the heats.

THEY came in last, but got a heroes' welcome. Chemo Savvy, a team of 22 breast cancer survivors, was one of five women's teams that competed in the Big Strokes For Little Folks River City Dragon Boat Races.

The event raised money to support pediatric clinical trials at Cancer Care Manitoba that help children get the best treatment and care possible.

A total of 50 teams competed in the event last Friday to yesterday at the Manitoba Water Ski Park on Murdock Road in St. Boniface.

One member of Chemo Savvy sat in the stern of the boat steering with a large rudder while 20 others paddled hard. To motivate them, a drummer in a neon pink afro wig sat in the bow and banged on a drum. In front of her, reaching into the sky from the bow was a sculpted dragon's head.

Chemo Savvy tried, but they weren't "pulling till they puked," a sweaty Shirley Stone, team spokeswoman, said.

After the final race on the last day a rose ceremony was held.

The team paddled into the middle of the lake and over a loud speaker a member announced they would honour their sisters who lost their fight against cancer.

The boat's crew then lifted pink roses and after a brief moment of silence they tossed the roses into the water.

On shore, families tossed white roses into the lake -- a symbol to honour those who lost their lives to cancer. Many cried and hugged.

Chemo Savvy continued their ceremonial paddling to shore, where other teams had lined up in two rows facing each other. The teams lifted their paddles and with the tips

touching created an archway that stretched 100 metres, bending along the shoreline, that the Chemo Savvy team walked under. Everyone was chanting "Chemo Savvy" and shaking hands with the emotional team.

Creating the archway began at a race in Saskatoon in 2002, Stone said.

"It's very emotional walking through it," Stone said. "You try not to bawl your eyes out."

"Every year it seems like more people are diagnosed with cancer. Every year we get a lot of feedback that it's not a death sentence. And that's our message."

"We are a living tribute," Stone said. "We still have a lot of life left in us."

There are more than 95 international breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams with about 35 in Canada.

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