

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW

Ride the Dragon.

Dragon boating, a 5,000 year-old sport, finds new life in the Midwest. **Nancy Saulsbury**

I lean forward in the drummer's seat of the dragon boat, knees tightly gripping the drum, listening intently to the instructions of the starter. Facing my twenty teammates, I bark out "Paddlers ready!" and they snap their paddles forward, ready to dig into our first stroke of the race. "We have alignment!" and the gun sounds. Our boat leaps forward — another dragon boat race is underway.

Dragon boat racing may be relatively new to the Midwest, but the archeological record shows that dragon boat races were being held in China over 5,000 years ago. Ceremonial for centuries, dragon boat racing took on added significance about 2,300 years ago when, according to popular legend, beloved poet and statesman, Qu Yuan, advised his king not to sign a treaty with a major adversary. The king rejected his advice, signed the treaty and banished Qu Yuan as a traitor. When the treaty turned out to be a ruse and the state fell to their enemy, Qu Yuan is said to have thrown himself into the river. When news of his suicide reached the villages, hundreds of local fisherman raced out to try and save him, to no avail. Beating their drums and splashing their paddles, they tried to scare away the fish and water dragons that might eat his body. Dragon boat races are said to be re-enactments of the villager's efforts to rescue Qu Yuan.

Dragon Boat festivals are held around the world today. Some are highly competitive with top-notch teams from around the globe. More common are the multitude of community-based festivals, which offer local participants a chance to form teams and paddle in camaraderie

with their friends, neighbors, or workmates. With just a bit of practice time, teams can learn the basics and enjoy a lively day of competition.

I've enjoyed dragon boating for over 10 years as a member of TEAMSurvivor Madison, an organization that provides women of any cancer diagnosis with fitness, friendship and fun. We paddle weekly to develop technique, stamina and teamwork and to enjoy being on the water together. While my favorite paddling is still filled with solitude, there's something equally rewarding about sharing the water with a group of friends at practices and at festivals. You love being in boats, right? Grab 20 of your closest paddling friends and try dragon boating this summer.

MIDWEST DRAGON BOAT FESTIVALS '15

Jun. 13-14	St. Charles, IL
Jun. 20	Madison, WI
Jul. 11	Milwaukee, WI
Jul. 11-12	St Paul, MN
Jul. 18	La Crosse, WI
Jul. 25	Arlington Heights, IL
Aug. 1	Kenosha, WI
Jul. 29-Aug. 1	Bemidji, MN
Aug. 8	Eau Claire, WI
Aug. 7-8	Starbuck, MN
Aug. 21-22	Superior, WI
Sep. 12-13	Dubuque, IA
Sep. 19	Oshkosh, WI



Nancy Saulsbury surveys her crew

May 17, 2015

58th Annual

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June 20, 2015

Vilas Park - Madison, WI



capitallakesdragonfest.com
Stop by the TEAMSurvivor Madison booth at Canoecopia