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DragonTales

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A Publication of DragonSports USA, Inc.
Promoting fitness and friendship through paddle sports!

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[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/
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A Decade from Idea to Reality

Dr. Joel Shilling

As the legend goes, dragon boat racing is the oldest continuously practiced sport in the world. The sport was first introduced into North America in the late 1970's with races in Oakland, California and Chicago. In the mid 1980's, Vancouver, British Columbia and Dubuque, Iowa staged their first races. In 1989, the first race in Portland was sponsored by the Portland-Kaohsiung Sister City Association under the leadership of Eng Lock Khoo and Mel Pittmon. During the early 1990's, Portland teams began to travel the world competing in races and making new friends. Teams from throughout North America (Washington D.C., Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Vancouver B.C.) participated in the Portland race and shared their ideas and skills. The founders of DragonSports USA gathered ideas from all the venues mentioned above, as well as, from Australia and England.

The most successful community model supporting dragon boat training was in Vancouver, B.C. The False Creek Community Center (part of the Vancouver City Parks Department) on Grandville Island provided a location for an independently organized club (False Creek Racing Canoe Club, FCRCC) to store its boats and equipment. The paddlers paid an annual fee of \$C6.00 to the Parks department and were allowed to use the meeting rooms, showers, and storage facilities. The FCRCC purchased boats, life vests and paddles, and established a fee schedule for teams wishing to participate in the training program. DragonSports USA patterned its structure after the FCRCC through a cooperative arrangement with the Portland Parks Department. City Commissioner, Charlie Hales paved the way through Parks Director, Charles Jordan for Richard Cole and Joel Shilling to secure a place to moor two Hong Kong style dragon boats and permission to place a locker on the dock.

Prior to securing moorage at RiverPlace, DragonSports had temporary moorage on the Columbia River at two locations. However, it seems that the coming and going of 22 or more paddlers every hour or so distressed the local boat residents and moorage privileges were rescinded. Were it not for the generosity of the City of Portland, the paddling program in Portland would likely be very different today.

On a trip to Sydney, Australia in 1993 the group which became the founding members of DragonSports was hosted for a dinner with a local team. The team's name: DragonSports Paddling Club. The name had a nice ring and described perfectly the intent of the founding members: to promote the sport of dragon boat racing and to foster fitness and friendship through paddle sports.

June 29, 1994, DragonSports USA was incorporated as a "Domestic Non-Profit" corporation. A database was established for communication between members. The initial 25 members, most members of the traveling team Portland Dragon Express (PDX). The group practiced first on the Columbia Slough at the Alder Creek Kayak Center and later at the moorage at Tomahawk Island. Other teams were forming and were invited to rent the boats which provided a source of revenue. The fee to join DragonSports USA was set at \$25.00, just as it is today. The

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Fitness and Friendship

Dr. Joel Shilling
President

The board of DragonSports USA oversees the conduct of business for an amateur athletic organization which has as its vision to *promote fitness and friendship through paddle sports*. Elsewhere in this issue of DragonTales there is a review of the history of the club outlining the founding principles, institutions, and people who saw the need for an organization to foster and encourage athletes to pursue excellence in what began as a new sport in Portland in 1989.

As with all things new, there is often a drive to further the activity to levels that seem reasonable at the time, but which over time are seen in a more realistic light. The idea that middle class, middle age athletes could master a paddle sport and become world class athletes was captivating and intoxicating. As we all knew, with a little more concentration, more focused practice and better coaching (leadership) we could vastly improve our stroke technique and emerge as teams that could set new world records.

What we actually accomplished in most cases was moderate improvement toward our goal of championship paddling, but more fulfilling were the friends that we made and the improvement in strength and fitness that we attained. We learned to work together in mind and motion as we had never been able to accomplish before. We stressed and suffered together with our bench partners and felt the exhilaration of doing our best and feeling completely spent at the end of a race. Sometimes we came in first in the race, but often the other teams had unlocked secrets of dragon boat racing just a bit better than we and finished a few hundredths of a second ahead of our team. We, however, finished tired but feeling oh! so good that we had worked together, bonding with 18 of our new closest friends and eager to improve for the next race.

It is that wonderful inner feeling of well being, of being with people that we liked and grew to admire that achieves the vision of the founders of DragonSports USA. It is that achievement that drives the board, volunteers, and members to provide and manage the resources needed to continue in the great sport of dragon boat racing in Portland.

To all those individuals and teams who began paddling in the Rose Festival event this year and veteran paddlers of seasons past, the board extends an invitation to continue your fitness program with new friends at a DragonSports practice. Please see page one for contacts to schedule a practice for your team or plan to attend one of the six weekly open practices provided by DragonSports USA.

DSUSA Races

Marilyn Adiar

Race Director, Dan Winkler is working with committees to bring us two races this year.

The Portland Race, August 2 & 3:
www.portlanddragonboatrace.com

For several years we have talked about having a two day summer race here in Portland.

Our Race Director, Dan Winkler is coordinating this into reality. It will be held on August 2 and 3 at Oaks Park. This site is easily accessible, the race course is visible from shore, and Oaks Park itself offers food and some other options. The two day race gives paddlers several opportunities to race. It is hoped that Rose Festival race teams will also participate, that it will draw international teams, and that this race will eventually draw a regional or national race to Portland. They are planning for 40 teams to include mixed, masters, open, women's, high school, and breast cancer survivor divisions. Your team should register soon. Dan can always use help. Contact him.

DSUSA Fall Regatta, September 6:
www.dragonsports-vancouver-lake-dragonboat-regatta.com

The Fall Regatta is a relaxed, friendly, picnic sort of a (competitive) race. The lake is beautiful and the site is also great for families and children. Some years the bees are carnivorous, but it is always fun. Schedule your team now for both of these races.

You Can Paddle Year-round... in Longer, Lower, Faster, More Fun Hong Kong Boats!

If your **team** is interested in continuing to paddle throughout the summer and even year-round, the process is quite simple; your team must complete the DSUSA Boat rental application packet, schedule a time with Pat Corbett, and make sure that every team member is a member of DragonSports USA.

Continuing to paddle as an **individual** is easy to do, too. Simply attend an open club practice, (see schedule on page 1) pay two dollars each for the first two practices, sign a waiver, help yourself to a life jacket and paddle. If you wish to continue to paddle after the first two times, you will need to joinDragonSports.

In brief, the cost for boat rentals is \$15 per hour, the cost for one lifetime membership is \$25. After joining, to paddle actively, members must pay \$25 each quarter, or a daily individual practice cost of \$2.00. Many more details including the boat rental packet and member application can be found online at www.dragonsports.org

DSUSA Has it All!

It takes a warehouse to keep DSUSA afloat and active. In it you can find an array of miscellaneous items such as lights for Christmas caroling on the boats, batteries, inverters, old and new paddles, and equipment for race setups. But, do you realize that currently we have five six-sixteen boats. One of them is one of the original teak boats. The four other boats are the newer, lightweight boats that we use for racing (and practices). We have caller seats, drum bases, and drums to equip them for racing. Our newest boat trailer has been designed to carry four boats at once. Recently a motorized boat was purchased to use for race setup and as a chase boat during races.

Charlene Cook and the Spirit of Blind Ambition

Shirley Ewart

Imagine her, tall, very good looking, happily married for 35 years, two grown children, successful business woman, member of a State Commission, downhill skier, and captain of the "Blind Ambition" Dragon Boat team. Yes, the dynamic Charlene Cook happens to be blind, but although her blindness obviously affects her, it by no means defines her.

When she was just seven years old, Charlene's vision had started to deteriorate. Retinitis Pigmentosa (rp) was diagnosed and by age 12 she could no longer read print. However, it was not until she was 17 that she learned Braille. Charlene met her husband Curt while she was at Girls' Polytechnic School; he was fifteen and she was just sixteen years old. They started dating and when she was twenty and he was nineteen years old they married. Her family approved of her choice; everyone loved Curt.

Once she had graduated from High School, Charlene went into food service and spent the next fifteen years working in three different coffee shops. It was during this time that Charlene and Curt adopted two children from the Philippines, son Janie and daughter Kami. She describes these as good years.

During this time, Charlene's mother and father owned Crantford's Flowers in Sellwood which they had bought from Mr. and Mrs. Crantford in 1972. By 1985, they were ready to retire and Curt and Charlene decided to buy the business. Owning a florist's shop was an entirely new adventure for the couple. Curt had been working as a mechanical draftsman, but his mother was an artist and he had often thought about pursuing a career in the arts. Charlene warmly praises her husband, stating: "He has developed into a superb floral artist!" In the meantime, Charlene, the business woman, took two courses in computer applications for the blind. Today, she is largely responsible for business operations of Crantford's Flowers. She answers the phone, advises clients, who often have quite complicated needs for weddings or funerals, and she makes arrangements for the delivery of bouquets to churches or homes.

Possibly Charlene's greatest resource is her "Braille n'Speak" machine. This computer is the size of a small notebook and has revolutionized the life of the non-print reader. When she enters Braille information into the machine, it can return the information in speech, making the order or decision available to those who don't read Braille. Charlene is a strong proponent of Braille communication, originally invented by Frenchman Louis Braille in 1828 and since modified and adapted for blind people throughout the world. She feels it would be a tremendous step backwards if the blind community ever lost their unique written language.

In 2000, Charlene became a member of the Oregon Commission for the Blind, a seven person board of two sighted and five non-sighted people with a mandate to promote employment, equipment, and training opportunities for blind citizens of Oregon. The Commission decided to sponsor a Dragon Boat team for blind paddlers, and it was suggested that Charlene would be the ideal person to serve on the team. She agreed and went to the DragonSports Association's training course. At the first practice, she sat in the boat, but remarks that she "hadn't a clue as to what was happening." A friend sitting behind her showed her the stroke. She says today: "I never missed a practice, but I hated every minute!"

At the 2002 Rose Festival, Blind Ambition did well, but Charlene, glad the season was over, vowed never to paddle again. She would not even paddle to return the boat to Willamette Park. But in July, she got an e-mail from her friend Corky Lai telling her that Blind Ambition was going to Oakland, California for a regatta. Charlene said: "No! No way!" Corky tried again: "This team needs you!" Putting the needs of the team over her own strong reluctance to paddle, Charlene decided to go. But she also persuaded Curt to paddle.

Since then, Charlene has been working out at the gym three times a week and has paid much more attention to her nutritional needs. Enhancing her fitness, plus Curt's presence, did the trick. She now loves dragon boating, and this year she is the team's captain. Corky Lai is co-captain.

Recruitment to Blind Ambition is by word of mouth. Initially, the Commission for the Blind publicized the team and invited the blind community to participate. The response has been phenomenal and this year **Sound Wave**, a second team of visually impaired people, was formed. Charlene is enthusiastic about dragon boating as a venue for blind people to meet others, both sighted and blind, and to participate in a team sport which may well change their lives. She points out that, without perfect vision, many people find socialization difficult. She also has a request for the sighted community. She asks: "When you see a blind paddler, take the initiative and introduce yourself. Announce your name. Invite the blind person to coffee. And follow through. The next time you see them, remind them who you are." The aims of the Portland's DragonSports USA are *Fitness and friendship through Paddle Sports*. So, take the initiative, make a new friend.

A Decade from Idea... continued from page 1
dues for members wishing to paddle regularly was set at \$25.00 per quarter. A newsletter **THE DRAGON EXPRESS** was begun by Geri Naumcheff on February 2, 1995. The initial letter urged teams to register and pay the \$1000 fee early for the 1995 Portland race. The Board of Directors included: Joel Shilling, President; Michele Hall, Vice-President; Richard Cole, Treasurer; Roger Williams, Equipment chair; Janice Choy, Bylaws chair, and Trish Gault, Gear Marketing. The newsletter took on its present name and format in the winter of 1996. The first editor was Michele Hall with Cris Trimble and Roger Williams as staff. The first *Dragon Tales* included articles entitled: Who are We?, 1995 DragonSports USA first Invitational Dragon Boat Race (September 23, 1995 with 15 teams), Member Interviews, How Far Can You Go?, Christmas Caroling, Clinics Offered, and The Body Shop describing aspects of sports training and injury prevention.

By its second year of existence, many of the present day functions, events, and principles were established.

In the next issue the history from spring 1996 to the present will be reviewed. Please send your recollections and interesting anecdotes to jmacshilli@aol.com for inclusion in this living history of our organization.

Paddles up, take it away. Good luck at the PKSCA Dragon Boat Races, June 7-8.

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2003 Calendar of Events

PKSCA Dragon Boat Races Portland, Oregon pkscaracedirector@hotmail.com	June 7-8
15th Annual Alcan Dragon Boat Festival Vancouver, B.C., Canada	June 13-15
Ocean County Dragon Boat Festival Newport Beach, California OCDragonBoat@aol.com	June 29
Cornucopia Festival Dragon Boat Race Kent, Washington dandc1@juno.com	July 12
DSUSA Portland Dragon Boat Race Eastbank Esplanade, Portland, Oregon dragonsports.race.director@attbi.com	August 2-3
The Hawaii Dragon Boat Festival Honolulu, Hawaii giffordchang@yahoo.com	August 9-10
Victoria Dragon Boat Festival Victoria, B.C., Canada victoriadragonboat.com	August 16-17
DSUSA Fall Regatta Vancouver Lake, Washington dragonsports.race.director@attbi.com	September 6
PDBA Regional Dragon Boat Championship Lake Merced, San Francisco, California hanswu@aol.com	Sept. 27-28

There is life after Rose Festival!



*Join the 1700 members of
 DragonSports USA who think
 there is life after Rose Festival.
 DragonSports USA offers
 year-round paddling,
 team boat rentals,
 coaching, tilling,
 and leadership
 opportunities.*

DragonSports USA offers:
 Open Club Practices
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 6:30 PM / Tues. & Thurs.
 8 AM / Saturdays

Team Boat Rentals/ Pat Corbett
 503-493-2608 or PatCorbett8@cs.com

Calling & Tilling Opportunities/ Gloria Jones
 503-639-2799 x1 or DragonSports@att.net

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