

I Volunteer: On the Dragon Boat

By Timmy Wong, Contributor

June 3, 2010

Despite not being much into sports, Fred Kohlberg has definitely embraced his newfound passion for dragon boating. As a bookkeeper nearing retirement, Kohlberg has found that the desire to volunteer and stay active in the community is a very positive feeling.

One activity he does is volunteer for the Twisted Dragons, Richmond's first 55+ dragon boating team. The Twisted Dragons, founded in 2009, was a joint initiative between Kohlberg and Sharon Bulger, the Facility Coordinator at the UBC Boathouse. The team provided an opportunity for seniors to stay fit, get connected to other people, and experience a sport that is growing in popularity. Currently, there are 25 team members from a diverse range of backgrounds – some are nurses and teachers, while others are real estate agents and businesspeople.

As the volunteer manager of the Twisted Dragons, Kohlberg is responsible for organizing team meetings and finances. He is also the team manager and assistant coach. However, he is one of 24 men and women in the dragon boat when the team is on the waters.

The team recently took part in the 2009 BC Senior's Games, which was held in Richmond. In the four heats that the Twisted Dragons took part in, they finished third in each of them. Kohlberg described it as "quite an amazing feat, considering the youngest member on [the] team is 55 and the oldest is in their mid-80s." Although most of the team was brand-new to dragon boating, Kohlberg cites their success as a result of their willingness to work together as a team and the camaraderie that carried over from the inaugural year/everyone embodied.

Kohlberg acknowledges the benefits of volunteering and leading an active life. "I had never been a sports-minded person before," he admits, "but dragon boating filled a niche that hadn't been there before." Using the Twisted Dragons as a stepping stone, Kohlberg volunteered his time for the 2010 Olympic Games, where he was a host for Speed Skating Canada members and families at the UBC Boathouse. As well, he is spending considerable time with other dragon-boating teams as well, helping their members perfect their strokes and coordination.

Being a part of the dragon boating team has also given the Twisted Dragons' members an opportunity to socialize and have fun while staying active. Kohlberg noted that close friendships have developed in the past year, especially because the team likes to go out after their weekly practices. As well, some members have taken their newfound skills to other 55+ dragon boating teams to assist them in coaching. By contributing their new skills back to the community, they are helping spread the idea of volunteerism and encouraging other teams to do the same.

To find out how to get involved with 55+ dragon-boating, call the UBC Boathouse at 604-247-2627 or email Fred at twisted.dragons55@gmail.com.

For more information on more volunteering opportunities, visit www.volunteerrichmond.ca or call 604-279-7020.