

Introducing Coach Brenda

This month, Brenda, Dragon Boat Coach and Commodore of SNCC, answers a few questions for the Catch.

- **How did you get involved in dragon boat?**

- In 2006, having never been in a dragon boat, I was asked to paddle on the Wellspring Niagara crew in the St. Catharines Dragon Boat Festival. I loved it and was delighted to paddle with them once a year. A Breast Cancer Survivor dragon boat crew started up in the Niagara Region in 2008. They were paddling at South Niagara Canoe Club. I joined them in their second year and never looked back.

- **How did you get involved in coaching dragon boat?**

- In 2014, members of SNCC Hope Floats put together a composite crew, Grape Canadian Survivors, to race in the International Breast Cancer Paddling Commission Dragon Boat Festival in Sarasota [Florida]. It was an amazing experience to be with thousands of breast cancer survivor athletes from all over the world, so the minute the 2018 festival in Florence, Italy opened their registration we entered another composite team, Wonder Woman's Warriors. I captained WWW, but we did not have a coach accompanying us to Italy, so I decided to take the Dragon Boat coaching course so I could best serve the crew. I then turned my coaching focus to Dragon Boat rentals at SNCC. In 2018, Special Olympics Welland contacted SNCC looking for a dragon experience for their members. I decided to put my coaching skills to good use and formed a Special Needs Dragon Boat Crew in 2019. Friday nights with this crew soon became my weekly happy hour.

- **Can you share a memorable paddling experience and what you learned from that experience?**

- While my youth was filled with sports, health, and ability, most of my adulthood has been fraught with health challenges and disability. With permanent disability caused by back injuries, my fitness and strength suffered. Time and again new health challenges would present themselves making participation in sports seem impossible to me. Then one day I was convinced to get into a dragon boat. I was sure it



Coach Brenda and her partner Gerry on the Weeki Wachee River in Florida, 2014.

was against my better judgement, but surprisingly, it did not increase the pain in my lower back. Once I found the confidence to join a dragon boat crew, I pulled my paddle [into the boat] during practice on a regular basis. I was steadfast, and paddling began to increase my mobility and fitness. Then one day, three years later, I was able to complete the entire practice plan without pulling my paddle. An emotional milestone I will never forget. That day, I proved to myself that hard work and determination pays off.

Photos provided by Brenda Arndt.



Coach Brenda paddling in Florence, 2018 with Wonder Woman's Warriors.

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- **How long have you been with SNCC?**
- I joined SNCC Hope Floats their first year, in 2010.

- **What is it like being with SNCC?**

- All my favourite “ I “ words. Invigorating! Inspiring! Idyllic! Innovative! Incredible! Inclusive!

- **What do you hope to accomplish as a dragon boat coach at SNCC?**

- One of the challenges Recreational and High-Performance Dragon boat at SNCC has faced over the years is [retention] and recruitment of new paddlers, especially during the on-water season. We offered “3 [practices] for free” for anyone to jump in the boat with us, but too many were not inspired to come back. The later we got into the season, the more fit and powerful the crews became, [and] the more difficult the practices were for a newcomer. Many found it too intense to learn the stroke, stay in time, and keep up the pace all at once. It often caused frustration for both the newcomer and the seasoned paddler when their paddles inevitably clashed. I saw the opportunity to grow the club by putting together a free Learn to Paddle program for newcomers. We will run these sessions to teach new paddlers the basic stroke in a fun, safe environment. The goal is to build confidence so [new paddlers] choose [to] join a program at South Niagara Canoe Club.

- **What else should the SNCC membership know about you?**

- Retired, I can wear a lot of hats at South Niagara Canoe Club. I am a member, a paddler, a crewmate, a volunteer, a captain, a coach, a board member, and the Commodore.
- Each of these roles have different responsibilities and benefit me in different ways. The benefits range from the opportunity to learn, to health and friendship, to helping others, to the satisfaction of achieving short- and long-term goals, to watching the club succeed. I encourage all members to contribute, however they are able. The benefits, while mostly intangible, are worth the effort. If you haven't already, I urge you to get involved, you'll be happy you did.
- I cannot accomplish all my goals without the help of the membership and [I] cannot express my appreciation enough for all the volunteering and hard work contributed to the club.

- **What do you hope to accomplish as Commodore of SNCC?**

- My personal goal is to grow SNCC in size, relevance and sustainability, while effectively serving the members and the community as they achieve their goals, enjoy paddling sports in their own right, and for those with high-performance dreams, [to] develop their skills to their full potential, while strengthening the sustainability of the club across all disciplines.



*Brenda at the SNCC 10
Year Anniversary
Spaghetti Dinner in 2018.*

