

# INTERNATIONAL BREAST CANCER PADDLERS COMMISSION



Two members of the IBCPC, Jenny Yule and Eleanor Nielsen, joined the press conference in Peterborough on October 22, 2009 for the announcement of the team registration for 2010.

The mandate of the IBCPC is to ensure that international breast cancer survivor participation festivals and international competitive events are raising awareness about life after a diagnosis of and treatment for breast cancer.

There are six members of the Commission:

- Jane Frost, Vancouver, Canada
- Michelle Hanton, Darwin, Australia
- Eleanor Nielsen, Toronto, Canada
- Jenny Yule, Vancouver, Canada
- Mary McAvoy, New Zealand
- Sandi Burmaster Jelinski, Oregon, U.S.A.

The IBCPC hopes to expand its membership to include representation from all nations once the organization has developed a structure as well as official guidelines and policies. <http://www.ibcpc.com/>

## **Jenny Yule**

Jenny Yule from Vancouver, British Columbia was born and educated in Wales. She was diagnosed with breast cancer when her children were four and seven and later they, her daughter-in-law and husband Ken became inspirational supporters of her paddling commitment. She joined Abreast In A Boat (AIAB) in 1997, the second year of breast cancer survivor dragon boat paddling, a team sport that has become an international symbol publicizing breast cancer survivorship. She felt the impact AIAB in its founding year, 1996 when a story hit the news headlines to the effect that a team of breast cancer survivors in fuchsia pink had participated in the Vancouver Alcan International Dragon Boat Festival, crossing the finishing line to tumultuous cheers.

She subsequently learnt that this had resulted from a medical experiment by Dr Don McKenzie, a sports medicine physician and exercise physiologist at the University of British Columbia, challenging the medical thinking that after treatment for breast cancer the upper body and arms in particular needed protecting, and activity risked lymphedema. To do this he chose dragon boat paddling, the archetypal strenuous, repetitive upper body exercise, and he invited twenty-four women who ultimately paddled at the 1996 Alcan Festival, to participate. What they had in common was that they were breast cancer survivors. Their life experiences, fitness levels and athletic abilities were as varied as their ages, which ranged from 31 to 62. Their paddling careers began with a careful regimen of land and water training and within five months they were paddling at Alcan, the only breast cancer survivor team. None of them got lymphedema. Everybody became healthier and fitter and they had fun. They had challenged themselves to do something they had never thought they would do and had succeeded. They showed that there is life after a diagnosis of breast cancer and gradually realized that dragon boating was a vehicle for raising breast cancer awareness. It is a profound story.

As Jenny's first season progressed she herself realized the other enormous benefits for all these women literally in the same boat: the acceptance, the instant camaraderie, the laughter, the understanding, the

support, the physical gains. Since then she has worked locally to raise awareness about the disease amongst young women and to encourage those emerging from it to try dragon boat paddling. She has watched with awe as breast cancer survivor paddling has spread around the world bringing similar benefits to all those who paddle: she has paddled in Poland, Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia and was at the launch of the first team in England in 2004. In 2005 she was thrilled and honoured to co-chair, with Jane Frost, Ten Years Abreast Celebration in Vancouver. Nearly two thousand paddlers and their supporters from seven countries came together, as they were to do two years later in Australia, to enjoy, support and learn from each other, to celebrate the impact paddling has had on their lives, their families and communities and again, to spread the word.

Jenny is pleased and honoured to be on the steering committee of the IBCPC encouraging international awareness and supporting participatory events. Nothing speaks to its mission more than the words of a 2008 AIAB novice when she said “ Two years ago I was in a hole in the middle of treatment and everything looked black. Then, one day I saw you guys, in fuchsia pink, paddling. As I watched I thought, they must have been where I am now and if they can get there and do that then so can I”.

### **Eleanor Nielsen**

Eleanor (Reg. N., M.H.Sc.) is retired from the National Office of the Canadian Cancer Society, where she was Director of Programs from 1991– 2001. She was responsible for program development, implementation and evaluation of Public Education and Patient Services programs across Canada. Her graduate studies at McMaster University focused on Health Promotion and Adult Education. Prior to that, Eleanor developed closed-circuit television systems in Canadian hospitals after many years in hospital nursing management.

Eleanor represented the Canadian Cancer Society in many components of the Canadian Breast Cancer Initiative, Health Canada, as well as early meetings of the Canadian Cancer Control Strategy federally. During the latter years of her position, she developed the background material for the Society’s broad based primary prevention program. She was responsible for planning and facilitating national meetings and worked with other disease based voluntary organizations collaboratively.

Eleanor co-founded the Toronto breast cancer dragon boat team, Dragons Abreast in 1997, and is an active volunteer for many organizations. She has attended all 5 Canadian World Conferences on Breast Cancer, and was the volunteer project manager for the International Support Links project in 2002 and 2008. She was an advisor for a Food Share project, investigating factors that enable women with breast cancer to make and sustain healthy eating habits; and an advisor for a research project on Psychosocial Benefits of Dragon Boating for Women with Breast Cancer. She has participated in research review panels for the National Cancer Institute of Canada (NCIC) and was a lay representative on the Steering Committee of the NCIC’s Cancer Prevention Research Initiative. She does public speaking on breast cancer and dragon boating, and was the inspiration for the book, *How to Ride a Dragon: women with breast cancer tell their stories*, Michelle Tocher, Key Porter, 2002.

Eleanor and her husband, Charles, have 5 children and 6 grandchildren between them.