



A bit of history:

A local breast cancer survivor, Meredith Cosburn was encouraged by her friend Barbara Stewart, a member of the Toronto Dragons Abreast dragon boat team, to do what she had done to help with her own recovery—join a dragon boat team. The closest team was in Cobourg so Meredith contacted Dorothy Hampson, founder of the Cobourg Survivor Thrivers.

In October of 1999, Meredith had recruited her co-worker Sherry Vaughn from Liberty Mutual Insurance and 4 others to form the beginnings of a Peterborough dragon boat team. She had also contacted Len Minty, an experienced paddler, and Dr. John Rowsom, Peterborough breast cancer surgeon.

An article in the Peterborough Examiner called for 16 more breast cancer survivors to join them. The first team meeting was held on November 18, 1999. Dr. Rowsom, then chief of surgery at PRHC, Len Minty an experienced and enthusiastic paddler willing to coach, and members of the Survivor Thrivers and Dragons Abreast team attended the meeting complete with a video and encouragement to start a Peterborough team. The hope was to compete at a Toronto race in the coming spring. Several women attended that meeting and by January 2000, the Peterborough and District Breast Cancer Survivors Dragon Boat Team (PDBCSDBT) was 27 members strong! All that was still needed was a boat.

Dr. Rowsom, was instrumental in helping the team overcome this hurdle. He and three other doctors, Dr. R. Chenoweth, Dr. J. Scott and the late Dr. R. Jaroszonek, each donated \$1,000 for a down payment towards a dragon boat. A story about the team published in the Peterborough Examiner sparked enough interest for Liberty Mutual to provide the rest of the money needed to pay for a dragon boat built by Glenn Fallis of Voyageur Canoe. The Holiday Inn then donated wharf space and the Chamber of Commerce offered free parking. Lawyer Bill Lockington volunteered free legal counsel to incorporate the team and operate under the hospital's umbrella.

Fundraising and raising awareness began right away with a float in the 1999 Santa clause parade, followed by an event at Portage place in January 2000 which included a "loonie toonie walk", where anyone wishing to donate money would stick their loonies or toonies to the tape on the floor. A benefit dance was held on April 1 at Trentwinds.

During the winter months, thanks to the generosity of the YMCA, Len Minty arranged for the team to start practising at the side of the pool using special, smaller practice paddles. The team's goal was to prepare for the real thing - dragon boat competitions in Pickering and the Toronto area.

Survivors Abreast's first race was in Pickering on June 10, 2000. They finished their 1st 500 meter race in 2 min 39 seconds, and to their surprise, Dr Rowsom was waiting for them on the dock. They attended the festival at the Toronto Islands on June 24 and 25 and after only 3 months of paddling, the team crossed the finish line in 4th place out of 8 teams, only 10 seconds behind the winning Toronto team.

In October of 2000, the team hosted its first pink ribbon ball which raised \$21,850. That money was donated towards the purchase of diagnostic imaging equipment for the breast assessment centre which officially opened at PRHC in September 2000, one of the first in Ontario.

Inspired by Len Minty and Meredith Cosburn, June 16th 2001 marked the beginnings of Peterborough's very own Dragon Boat festival. Referred to as Liberty Mutual's "Day on the Water",



this community event sponsored by Liberty Mutual was organized by a few members of Survivors Abreast, the Canadian Canoe Museum (with Peterborough Green Up) and the Peterborough Family YMCA. It brought together 35 dragon boat teams including 4 survivor teams racing a 400 metre course, scores of canoeists to compete in events for families with children, and participants in the 3rd annual Great Kawartha canoe-a-thon featuring a course from Lakefield to Little Lake. Just over \$25,000 was donated to the Breast Assessment Centre.

The following year, Peterborough's Dragon Boat Festival took on a life of its own and has since grown to be a successful annual community event.

In the beginning, the Draggin' Dawgs dragon boat team was a supporter team made up of spouses, sons, daughters & friends of Survivors Abreast team members who had been touched by breast cancer. Susan Miller, was inspired by her friend and breast cancer survivor, Lee Anne Willshaw, to be captain of the team. For several years, this dedicated group raced in Peterborough's festival and sometimes travelled to out-of-town festivals with Survivors Abreast, racing or cheering them on from the shore.

Survivors Abreast travelled to Vancouver in 2005 in celebration of the Abreast in a Boat team's 10th anniversary and of Dr Don Mackenzie who founded the breast cancer paddling movement. This festival proved to be the very first International dragon boat festival for breast cancer paddlers. A second one was held in Australia 2 years later. These led to the formation of the International Breast Cancer Paddlers Commission (IBCPC), a commission of the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF). A formal bidding process was introduced for the 2010 International festival, and Peterborough was chosen over 2 teams from England, 1 from Italy and 1 from New Zealand. 66 teams came from all over Canada, the US, Australia, England, Italy and South Africa. Survivors Abreast was awarded three Peterborough Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence awards that year. One for tourism, Health and Wellness and Marketing, and one for Promotions. The International festival has been held every 4 years since 2010. Survivors Abreast travelled to Sarasota in 2014, Florence Italy in 2018 and will be attending the IBCPC festival in Waikato New Zealand in 2023.

The team was awarded a Civic Award for community betterment in 2007 and in 2008 Survivors Abreast was presented with a Peterborough This Week Philanthropy Award.

Below is a brief accounting of the Peterborough Dragon Boat Festival, including the number of teams, the amount donated, the festival chair, and how the money was used. To date, the festival has raised over \$3.7 million dollars in support of equipment to screen, diagnose and treat breast cancer at PRHC

Year	Number of teams	Chair	Amount donated	How the funds were used
2001	35	Meredith Cosbourn and a co-chair from the YMCA	\$25,000	See description in 2008
2002	50	Meredith Cosbourn	\$84,509.18	See description in 2008
2003	81	Meredith Cosbourn	\$158,592.10	See description in 2008
2004	96	John Gullick	\$175,123.57	See description in 2008
2005	104	John Gullick	\$175,300.39	See description in 2008
2006	95	John Gullick	\$216,889.50	See description in 2008
2007	94	John Gullick	\$235,778.75	See description in 2008



2008	100	John Gullick	\$202,966.65	The money donated in 2008 and previous years went towards a dedicated high-end ultrasound system, an AGFA mamoray daylight film handling system and upgrading 3 analogue mammography machines to digital mammography machines. When the new hospital was built and opened in 2008 the new Breast Assessment Centre was named after the team In recognition of the fundraising success and contributions throughout the years.
2009	102	John Gullick	\$223,650.43	Computer aided detection system for breast MRI imaging, workflow manager software, and a second sentinel node probe.
2010	101	John Gullick	\$222,488.21	Tissue processor and the PRHC Closer Campaign which was an initiative to locate a radiation facility at PRHC. Of note, the closer campaign was chaired by team member Margie Lightbody
2011	98	John Gullick	\$271,348.35	PRHC's radiation facility.
2012	87	Carol Mutton	\$223,257.84	Ultrasound machine
2013	77	Carol Mutton	\$204,138.48	Voice recognition system
2014	82	Carol Mutton	\$200,737.03	Software and workstations at the breast assessment centre.
2015	70	Debbie Keay	\$163,693.96	3 x 3D mammography
2016	66	Debbie Keay	\$196,468.50	3 x 3D mammography
2017	67	Carol Mutton and Michelle Thornton Co-Chairs	\$182,518.58	3 x 3D mammography

2018	67	Michelle Thornton	\$211,238.32	2 x Tissue processors for the laboratory (\$188,000) /additional proceeds designated towards the SPECT-CT priority.
2019	62	Michelle Thornton	\$241,738.54	Cellavision – a laboratory system that performs automated digital cell mapping of bloodwork.
2020	Festival Cancelled due to Covid-19	Gina Lee	\$58,871.26	RIVA – Robotic IV Automation system a robotic technology that automates the process of preparing medicines for chemotherapy
2021	Virtual Festival due to Covid-19	Gina Lee	\$95,568.43	Diagnostic Ultrasound Machine for the Breast Assessment Centre
		Total to date	\$3,769,878.07	

Link to:

Peterborough Dragon Boat Festival historic video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQQKdCE2ZT8>

Survivors Abreast historical video: <https://youtu.be/ezNwkDO-Ne8>