

This Unique Boat Race Benefits Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County

The participants will be driving dragons for a good cause on July 21.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF DUTCHESS DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

On July 21, the view from the shores of Poughkeepsie gets even more spectacular with the return of the Dutchess Dragon Boat Race & Festival, now in its fifth year.

In this fundraising event for Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County, teams ply the 200-meter river racecourse in 30 colorful dragon boats provided by 22 Dragons of Montreal. Each fiberglass boat is roughly 40 feet in length with a carved dragon head at the front, scales painted on the hull, and a wooden tail at the back. On board for each team are 16 paddlers (no experience required), a drummer, and a professionally trained steerer.

The public can view the races from the free Riverside Festival at the Hudson River Rowing Association in Poughkeepsie, featuring food trucks, vendors, artists, and entertainment.

"We have participants from everywhere coming together to embody the definition of what community really means," said Corri Nicoletti, volunteer and co-coordinator for Marketing and Public Relations. The event launched in 2014; in 2017 Habitat for Humanity became the host.

Dragon boat races honor the nearly 2,400-year-old story of Chinese poet Qu Yuan, who drowned himself in the Miluo River. Local fishermen — along with drummers — paddled long boats and splashed the surface of the water to scare the fish and prevent his body from being eaten. Dragon boats have been used in international race competitions in Hong Kong since 1976.

For more information on registering to race (as a team or individual) or to participate as a vendor or a sponsor, go to www.dutchessedragonboat.org.