

Planning to Retire? Plan to join SLOCREA: SLO County Retired Employees' Association!

Check out our website at www.slocrea.org. We have links to many organizations important to Seniors, people considering retiring, &/or people needing info for aging relatives. Please let us know of any other links you'd like to see on our website.

Also on our website we have a brochure containing a new member application. We are an all-volunteer organization for everyone who receives a pension from SLO County Pension Trust. Everyone. Including DROPpers! Yes, if you are in DROP, you are qualified right now to join SLOCREA! Divorced and widowed spouses are also qualified to join.

New retirees are now getting our new application forms from Pension Trust or our website. They are responding well to receiving automatic first year free membership in SLOCREA. Many renewing retirees are opting for our 3-years-for-\$40.00 offer over the \$15.00 per year membership.

Our next meeting is a potluck picnic at El Chorro Regional Park, at the Dairy Creek picnic area, on Tuesday July 11, 2023. More details next month, or check our website after July 1st. We may or may not have a brief Board meeting directly following. We will likely have a regular board meeting Tuesday September 5th, 2023, likely via Zoom around 1:00 PM. More details are likely to appear in our August Blade article. Hey, we're retired and in vacation mode. 😊

June is Cancer Survivorship Month. Our shoutout, therefore, goes to all cancer survivors and thrivers. A "Survivor" is anyone who has ever received a cancer diagnosis of any kind and is still alive. A "Thrivers" is a Survivor who is thriving, and each of us gets to decide for ourselves whether we are thriving!

As you likely understand by now, dragon boating plays an important role in my thriving. In April, a small group of breast cancer survivors from Central Coast Survive Oars dragon boat team got a jump on celebrating Survivor/Thrivers Month by participating in the International Breast Cancer Paddling Council's Breast Cancer Participatory Dragon Boat Race Festival at Lake Karapiro, New Zealand. We had registered for this event in July, 2020. The event was postponed twice while New Zealand's borders were closed against COVID. The borders re-opened at the end of 2022. We already had our plane tickets and accommodations for the week-long festival.

In March I realized this was really going to happen and the excitement began.

Our CCSO group of 8 BC survivors had formed a coalition team with paddlers from Coastal California all the way from Berkeley to San Diego, plus 1 from Colorado, for a total of 20 paddlers and 1 steersperson. (The Festival provided an expert Caller/Drummer.) We also had a survivor of a different type of cancer as our Team Manager. She transported our paddles and arranged various activities.

We all came together for one practice session in February and stayed in touch on the internet. One paddler is a fitness coach who provides a Zoom fitness class 3 days a week. It's specifically tailored to developing the muscles used in dragon boating. It's been especially helpful to me for that, plus getting to know the other paddlers better.

Even before we arrived in New Zealand I knew this adventure was worth the wait. It did not disappoint. New Zealand is a beautiful country and the people there are kind and friendly. They celebrate their Māori heritage. Many different ethnicities are represented in New Zealand, perhaps most notably people from China and India. All are respected.

While we were having a super wet winter, New Zealand was having a super wet summer, so their fall hills and fields were super green and very lush. Many scenes are similar to our central coast; others are similar to the farm fields of Connecticut and the British Isles. The most striking difference are the giant tree ferns, which grow in great abundance. The ones we saw are Mamaku. They can grow to 20 meters in height. They are a symbol of new life.

Some of us took a tour to the glow worm caves and Hobbiton. Various of us saw some of the many other sights, too.

There were dragon boat teams from many different countries, including: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, China, Italy, Malaysia, New Zealand, Romania, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, UK, USA. Some teams were composites from several teams within the same country and some were composites from several different countries.

Team names express exuberance and creativity, for example: DAM Oarsome, Rowbust Breast Buddies, Abreast of Life, Busting with Life, Sistership, Treasure Chests, Missabittatitti.

The races were scheduled for Saturday and Sunday: 3 heats each. On Saturday the heats were 500 meters; on Sunday, 200. However, the wind came up swift and strong. Everyone had trouble getting their boats to the start line on Saturday. The water was very choppy. No tide, though, but rough conditions. We did only 2 heats. Our 3rd was canceled. Sunday the wind was even stronger: downright fierce. We got 1 heat in and then the rest of the races were canceled. Paddlers helped get the all boats to shore.

Nobody seemed to mind: When delays and cancelations were announced, various whole teams spontaneously erupted in cheerful songs and dances. Everyone was having a great time and was happy just to be there.

The usual Flower Ceremony closing the event had to be done totally on land. Usually several boats are in the water, with representatives from each team in them, while all the other survivors are on shore. This time everyone was on shore. Names of our former teammates who have "paddled on ahead" are read and everyone throws a flower into the water in memory of them. We also honor those among us who are in active treatment. It's beautiful and emotional.

Our team was thrilled to be there. We did quite well in a field of 80 other teams: our times put us in the 11th spot out of a total of 81 teams. Everyone received a participation medal (with an adorable dragon on it). If I can, I will include a photo here. Most importantly, we were there together celebrating breast cancer survivorship!

“We paddle to show there is life after a breast cancer diagnosis, and to honour those who have passed.” The Queensland, Australia, Missabittatitti Teams

“Our shared experience of surviving cancer profoundly bonds us. We’ve been through our own personal battle, but when we are in the dragon boat, we have one beat – one breath moving us forward from that battle making us victorious in our common goal of living for the moment and making it count!” Central Coast SurviveOars.

Dragon boat organizations offer a diverse range of opportunities for people across all levels of paddling and all levels of health, plus a variety of social events. Supporters and survivors, men and women, reckers and racers: all are welcome. Check out dragon boating on California’s Central Coast at www.ccdba.org.

~The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and are subject to change without notice.~