

'We Can Row' helps women endure cancer

Group started
20 years ago,
now meets on
Thursdays

BY RUTH EPSTEIN
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SALISBURY — Back in the early 2000s, Noreen Driscoll was experiencing the loss of several friends to cancer. She found a way to remember them and help others who were facing the disease. On Saturday, with Lake Washinee's glistening water as a backdrop, she and a crowd of women and men, celebrated a milestone in that journey.

Driscoll said she had organized a series of fundraisers as memorials, "But I felt I needed to do more," she said, "So I did."

She applied for, and received a Pelaton Award for \$5,000. Wanting to do something for the community — something that involved water — she came upon an article in a Lance Armstrong magazine about We Can Row "and I said this is it."

She used that money to create Women Enduring Cancer, which transitioned into the Tri-State chapter of We Can Row.

It began with a group of eight women, and now 20 years later, the program has been embraced by dozens of women in various stages of recovery.

Every Thursday from May to October at 6 p.m., participants gather at the Salisbury School boathouse to climb into a boat and row around the lake. They not only gain physical strength from the activity, but emotional well-being too.

"The benefit of rowing includes being part of a group and helps to keep the lymphedema in arms down," Driscoll said. "And being with people who are literally



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Marking the 20th anniversary of the Tri-State We Can Row for cancer survivors are, from left, Carl Jenter, driver of the motorized launch, founder Noreen Driscoll and longtime coach Dick Curtis.

in the same boat with whom you can share stories with."

She described the first three years of the program when these women who'd never rowed before "were rocking and rolling all the time" trying to keep the boat steady.

Among those early rowers was Jane Lloyd, who died way too early, said Driscoll. The Jane Lloyd Fund was established in her memory to help cancer victims with their everyday expenses and has become an integral part of the community helping hundreds of residents.

Lloyd died in year two of We Can Row's existence and after her death the group participated in its first regatta. They proudly noted that some members have been winners in competitions.

Driscoll said in addition to rowing, a strong camaraderie has formed. "We've become a social group and we do that really well."

Up until recently, Ben Freund was the lone male in the boat. He would bicycle with Rob Bettigole, who had been a coach and talked about the program. When Freund's cousin Jacolyn Brown was diagnosed, Freund suggested she might want to look into joining and she has since become an active member. And in turn, when Freund was diagnosed, she suggested he think about helping to carry the boat from the boathouse to the water.

"I did, and found this incredible group," Freund said. "Deep down working in unison syncs well. And I know this has been said a lot, but there is truly a magical experience being out on the lake. It sucks you in."

He likes to say he's the "brother who broke the glass ceiling," but he has now been joined by another man.

Dick Curtis, longtime rowing coach at Salisbury School,

coached the women for years, along with Bettigole. Now Anne Kelly has taken on the role. Carl Jenter, whose wife was a friend of Driscoll's and died of cancer, has been a loyal driver of the motorized launch, which accompanies the boat out onto the water.

Driscoll expressed her deep appreciation to those who have volunteered their services, as well as to Salisbury School for its support in providing a boat, facilities and use of its erg training room during the winter months. A group of four musicians played a song especially written for the group.

New members are always welcome. No experience is necessary, but those joining should be prepared for physical activity and the promise of support and friendship.

Contact Ruth Epstein at kcsrute@aol.com.