

Dragon Boat Festival 2009

September 2009

On Saturday August 8, 2009, people came from all over the Laurentians to participate in and to watch the 2nd Annual Dragon Boat Festival in St. Adolphe d'Howard. Organized by the municipality, it is a fundraising event for the *Fondation médicale des Laurentides et des Pays-d'en-Haut*, the foundation that provides much-needed equipment to the hospital in Ste. Agathe and to the CLSCs and long-term care facilities in the areas served by the CSSS des Sommets and the CSSS des Pays-d'en-Haut, an area that extends from St. Sauveur right up to Labelle.

After participating in the 2008 event, having taken up a paddle for the team representing the CSSS des Sommets, I suggested to the English Communities Committee that we should put together our own team, as a way of helping build community and to make our presence felt. The members of the committee embraced the idea and we set out along two separate but intersecting paths: to find a team of paddlers and to raise funds for the foundation. We decided that simply raising the \$2,000 required to secure a boat for our team was not enough. We would challenge the members of our far-flung communities to raise as much as we could.

First, we had to settle on a team name. Ideas were tossed around and debated and the spirit of good humour reigned when we christened ourselves the *Équipe des Têtes-carrées*, in order to underline our English identity.

Our members fanned out, spreading pledge forms far and wide. And they brought results. As of the day of the race, we had collected over \$4,000, and cheques were still coming in. Every cent was turned over to the foundation, which issues tax receipts directly to the donors. People signed up to fill the benches with the required 20 paddlers plus a coxswain. Richard Fugère kindly designed a logo for us and Victoria Barrett took on the role of team captain and coach.

Ten days before the event, a practice boat was delivered to the St. Adolphe marina and we got our first chance to try out our teamwork. A week later, we were given another half-hour opportunity to develop our technique and rhythm, and that was it as far as preparation went, one hour in a type of boat that only a few of us had ever even sat in before!

Saturday dawned bright and sunny after a frigid night, when the temperature had dipped to under five degrees. But, after the rainy weeks that came before, no more ideal weather could have been imagined. Twelve teams had signed up for the races, which would be held in heats of three boats at a time. Each team would compete three times over the course of the day, twice in the morning to establish the ranking for the afternoon finals.

We were in the first heat, and, despite an awkward start, we managed to make it up and clock a good time, but there were still nine more boats to go. We anxiously watched the races and kept an eye on the times as they were posted, and, though we dropped to third place, we were contenders. The second heat followed and we were happy with our performance, which left us in third place overall. Then, after a lunch provided by the organizers, a pep talk under the canopy provided to our team by the Lingat family of the Vallée Bleue ski hill, and massages by our personal masseuse, Zusa Lingat, we competed in the final against teams representing the Caisse Populaire and the Municipality of Morin Heights. We came in third, but, considering that the Morin Heights team is made up of members of the Viking Club who practice regularly in their own dragon boat, and the Caisse Pop group showed their strength by coming in first, we were very proud of our performance, the three boats all nosing in over the finish line within a second and a half of each other.

But we were even prouder of the fact that the English communities raised more than double the entry fee, contributing a significant portion of the funds raised and winning the more important of the races!

If you would like to be included in this great community effort, your contributions are still welcome for this year. Please make cheques payable to the Fondation médicale des Laurentides et des Pays-d'en-Haut and mail them to Ann Stafford at 171 ch. Lac de la Grise, Ivry, J8C 2Z8 so that they will be credited to our boat and committee. And don't forget to let us know if you want to join in the fun at next year's event.

Sheila Eskenazi, President, English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets