

4TH IBCPC FESTIVAL, SARASOTA 2014

AN EXTRACT FROM OUR BOOK HERE BE DRAGONS

By Dara Duffy

In October 2014 the impressive Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota was the venue for the Fourth International Breast Cancer Paddlers' Commission Festival, which welcomed over 2,700 paddlers, all of whom have had breast cancer. The paddlers came from 101 clubs in 12 countries, including Canada, Australia, the UK and Singapore. The event in the Sunshine State of Florida marked the first time that the United States had held the festival, which had previously been hosted by the Canadian cities of Vancouver (2005) and Peterborough (2010) and Caloundra, Australia (2007). From the pink-clad opening ceremony, which featured fireworks and an entertaining keynote speech by Dr Susan Love, to the myriad of Wellness Day Presentations (Zumba, Laughter Yoga, Tai Chi for paddlers, etc.) and the Parade of Nations, the event was a huge success.

Team Ireland was established in early 2014 as a result of funding secured from Arthur Guinness Projects. The team was made up of paddlers from Carlow, Clonmel, Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Waterford and Northern Ireland. Over a period of just seven training days a group of enthusiastic strangers (some of whom had never paddled before) was transformed under the watchful eyes of coach Julie Doyle, team captain Margaret Mulcahy and vice-captain Susan Rowe into a strong, focused and determined team.

Drive and determination were evident in the team's performance on the water. Despite the blistering heat, at times 40°C, Team Ireland performed strongly and consistently, securing times of 2.47 minutes in the two 500-metre Saturday races and 2.44 minutes in the two Sunday races. Overall, the Irish finished 29th out of 101 teams and were the top European team in the competition.

But it wasn't all hard work. Despite a hectic racing and training schedule. Team Ireland made sure to enjoy their downtime. This included bargain hunting at the outlet malls, sightseeing at the impressive Ringling Museum and visiting the pristine white sands of Siesta Beach, voted the top beach in the USA. Thanks to transport sponsorship from Fyffes, Team Ireland also enjoyed a guided tour of Sarasota.

Wherever Team Ireland went, they made new friends. Jack and Claudia Barnett met members of Team Ireland at Grand Canal Dock during a holiday in Dublin. The next thing they knew, Jack and Claudia were hosting some thirty Irish paddlers at a drinks reception in their lovely home in Sarasota.

The IBCPC Festival has a number of traditions, including the swapping of club pins and racing shirts, and the Sandy Smith Global Race, where representatives from each team race together. Following the Sandy Smith race, the ten boats that had participated lined up together with other boats for an emotional flower ceremony, where friends and fellow paddlers who have passed away from breast cancer were remembered.

For the members of Team Ireland, the IBCPC Dragon Boat Festival was, without doubt, the trip of a lifetime. The festival may be over, but friendships and magical memories remain. And with the promise of new teams being formed, Team Ireland's legacy is just beginning.