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## **Women, dragons join to battle breast cancer**

### ***Survivors form first Ohio Dream Team***

by Lauren Krupar  
*Reporter*

SILVER LAKE – What began as the idea of one woman has expanded to encompass the passions of more than 75 area women who take to the waters at Portage Lakes every week as Ohio's first dragon boat team.

"I only thought we'd have 20 members," Silver lake resident and team founder Jessica Mader said. "I have 76 and expect to have 100 soon. Everybody's been so enthusiastic."

The women are all members of the Dragon Boat Dream Team, based out of Portage Lakes. They launched their first dragon boat June 9 and have been practicing paddling and teamwork ever since.

The members – from Akron, Stow, Tallmadge, Silver Lake, Munroe Falls, Youngstown and elsewhere – have one thing in common. They are breast cancer survivors.

"They treat breast cancer patients very successfully, but there's no cure," Mader, herself a breast cancer survivor, said. "We want to be visible reminders of our vitality. We will be great."

Dragon boat teams comprising breast cancer survivors began forming in Canada in 1996. Each team has 20 paddles, a drummer and a steer person.

Dragon boats originated in China. Today, breast cancer teams perform an "Awaken the Dragon" ceremony with a Chinese dragon dance each time a new boat is launched to remember the heritage.

After more than 10 years, there are dragon boat teams in every province in Canada with new teams forming in the United States – all comprised of breast cancer survivors.

"It's a sport and an exercise," Mader said.

### **The origins of the Dream team**

In 2005, Mader had finished her chemotherapy and left Ohio for a vacation in her family's home in Nova Scotia. There, she found a life vest, paddle, birthday card and note from her niece.

"The note was telling me to be at the dock at 6 o'clock every Wednesday night," Mader said, adding she went to the dock and joined the Bosom Buddies, a dragon boat team her niece had been a member of. "It was so shocking for me to be in the same boat she was in."

In the two summers she spent on the boat, Mader said her attitude and health improved. She became an enthusiastic athlete and took that enthusiasm back with her to Silver Lake.

Her doctor, Akron Dr. Douglas Wagner, noted the change and encouraged her to keep participating in dragon boating. Mader she will never forget her last appointment with Wagner in 2006.

"He told me that when I get my dragon boat ready, he'll buy it for me," Mader said. "I thought he was crazy."

Dragon boats, Mader said, cost between \$10,000 and \$30,000, with corporate sponsors providing the majority of the money.

But less than a year later. The team launched their dragon boat, purchased by Dr. Wagner, into Rex Lake and have been paddling ever since.

Mader said the group, which practices several times a week on Portage Lakes, plans to begin competing in dragon boat races next year.