

Tamir participates in Ottawa Dragon Boat Festival

By Ilana Belfer

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Tamir participants teamed up with family members, board members, staff and volunteers to race a 44-inch dragon boat across Mooney's Bay.

It was Team Tamir's first time participating in the Ottawa Dragon Boat Festival, which took place over the weekend of June 17 to 19.

Ottawa's is the biggest dragon boat festival in North America. Thousands of paddlers race in 22-person teams on long, slim boats – a dragon's head at the bow and a tail at the stern, based on the 2,400-year-old Chinese dragon boat tradition.



Team Tamir at Mooney's Bay for the Ottawa Dragon Boat Festival.

"We heard about dragon boat and how it's been such a phenomenal success ... It's such a fun event," said Tamir Executive Director Mark Palmer about their decision to enter the festival.

Palmer explained that participating in the festival is not only about the day of the race. "It's about the preparation and becoming a team together," he said.

Tamir team practices took place nearly every Sunday and Wednesday from the beginning of May with the help of coaches Amanda Kijewski and Leah Dobbin from the Rideau Canoe Club.

"Things that some paddlers might take for granted, like being able to paddle in unison, or even knowing how to put their paddle in the water takes some doing – more practice, more patience, more perseverance," Palmer explained.

Tamir participant Shirley Harris said practising for the race was a lot of work, but it eventually got easier and she felt stronger over time.

"Everybody was so charged up, having a blast every minute," Palmer noted.

Other than pure fun, Tamir Development and Communications Co-ordinator Melanie Fulop said part of the reason they put the team together was to further Tamir's "vision and values" of helping participants realize their potential and make meaningful contributions to society.

Each member of Team Tamir fundraised for the event, surpassing their goal of \$2,500.

Funds raised by the various dragon boat teams are distributed by the Ottawa Dragon Boat Foundation to selected charities including the Ottawa Humane Society and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

"Tamir enjoys so much support ... We want to demonstrate how people with developmental disabilities are really an asset to the community and how we give back everyday," Palmer said, mentioning that participants volunteer at Hillel Lodge, hold jobs in the community, and sing all over the city in the Tamir Choir.

"I hope [Tamir's participation] will continue because it's to help other organizations who need the help and it's nice to be part of the Dragon Boat Festival," Harris said.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me besides Joseph," she added in reference to Tamir's production of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat in 2010.

Participant Jason Kershman said his favourite parts were paddling with the different teams who were there and being among friends. Kershman said it is something he would want to take part in it again.

So, how did Team Tamir fare on the day of the race?

"Well, we didn't come last," participant Debbie Applebaum said with a big smile.