



Hope Afloat team fastest in Seattle

By Al Garcia
Special to the Echo

The Comox Valley's Hope Afloat team just extended their racing reputation to the international stage last weekend by winning the very first Cancer Cup at the Seattle Dragon Boat Fest.

That's the team's fourth strong showing this summer, having already earned silver and bronze medals in the prestigious Victoria and Nanaimo Dragon Boat Festivals, plus a big win at home, last month, during our own Nautical Days.

While Hope Afloat, coached by for-

mer Olympic canoeist Don Irvine, is usually crewed by breast cancer survivors exclusively, their category had been altered for these races to include all cancer survivors, allowing the Comox Valley team to expand their ranks to 24 paddlers.

Other dragon boat categories were open to hospital and medical service employees (the Specimen Cup), and also to corporate sponsors and donors in the Corporate Cup, but Hope Afloat could've raced them too, having set fastest time of the day over the 500 metre course.

Top teams came from as far as Los Angeles to race and have fun, but

more importantly, get together in raising awareness of the importance of play and exercise, in cancer recovery.

"That was really the message of Seattle's fest and all the others too," said Hope Afloat's Marcie Petersen. "It's not just about the boats or the racing either. Locally we have our Tag Day, we hand out an annual bursary to a deserving medical student, we buy medical equipment for the hospital [Gamma camera last year], and this year we'll be volunteering in the Tour de Dance."

Asked about Hope Afloat's future Petersen said, "our competitive year

is over, but we'll resume dry land training right away, and maintain that through the fall and winter."

"As far as our racing future," Petersen continued, "we've tentatively got our eye on the Berlin Dragon Boat Championships, in the Fall of 2005, but like everything else, we'll just have to see."

Poke around a little on the Internet and you'll see that Dragon Boat racing is said to be the fastest growing team sport, not just in North America, but all over the world. Interested? For more information call Marcie Petersen at 338-2112, and remember, keep paddling.