

United Way Dragon Boat Festival splashes down in King

By Jake Courtepatte

The sun shone down on Seneca College's King campus last Saturday as hundreds of thrill-seekers took to the waters of Lake Seneca in the sport of dragon boating.

It was one of the first grand events for United Way since the merger of the Toronto and York Region chapters, completed at the end of June.

"We're now one big region from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe, and it's days like today with the support here that we see we can handle such a large area," said UWTYR president Susan McIsaac.

Now in its 12th year, the Toromont CAT Dragon Boat Festival saw 10 teams from as far north as Barrie and south as Toronto competing in heated races throughout the morning and afternoon.

Crews of 20 worked in unison to paddle the 40-foot boats, with a drummer at the head to keep timing. The races, from across Lake Seneca to the main docks, lasted only a few exhilarating minutes.

"Your heart really gets pumping, with everyone working together in such a small space," said Sarah Amadei, one of the competitors.

"It's like even though there are so many people in the boat each person's effort counts."

King Mayor Steve Pellegrini was up bright and early to see the racers off.

"We are so happy to support the United Way and everything it does," said Pellegrini. "They do so much for the community in York Region, and it's an honour to host them every year."

The event, which also included a barbecue lunch, tug-of-war, beach volleyball and a children's play area, raised almost \$30,000 to help United Way provide social supports to families in need around York Region.

"It's a staggering amount of money," said Hugo Blasutta, vice-chair of UWTYR. "After the merger we became the largest United Way chapter in the world. In the entire world. Support like this is the reason we were able to do so."

UWTYR launches their annual campaign at the Canadian Institute for the Blind on Sept. 1.

"This was a precursor to what should be one of our most successful fundraising campaigns ever," said Blasutta.