



GRAB A PADDLE: Lorraine Baker is gearing up for a new summer rowing ritual that commences at the Brittingham Boathouse.

Rigged for Recovery

We Can Row brings specialized rowing instruction to area breast cancer survivors **BY JENNIFER GARRETT**

Lorraine Baker grew up on the shores of Lake Mendota. But the sixty-year-old special education assistant and breast cancer survivor doesn't get out on the water as often as she once did, and certainly not as often as she would like. ¶ "It dawned on me," she says. "I live out in Verona and I can go weeks or months without seeing the lakes." ¶ So when she heard about the new We Can Row program offered through the Camp Randall Rowing Club, she decided

it was time to get back in a boat. "It's a great workout," she says, "and it's always so relaxing to be on the water. So when I heard about it, I thought I'd give it a try."

We Can Row Madison is a rowing training program geared primarily to breast cancer survivors, but it is open to all cancer survivors. Modeled after successful We Can Row programs in other cities (including Boston, Washington, D.C., and East Lansing, Mich.), Madison's effort is designed to teach the fundamentals of rowing in a safe environment that addresses and accommodates any special physical concerns related to participants' cancer diagnoses and treatment.

Madison attorney Steve Schaefer and community volunteer Sally Miley are responsible for bringing We Can Row to the Brittingham Boathouse, which the Camp Randall Rowing Club operates, on Monona Bay. Schaefer, a rowing club board member, has been an avid advocate



GOOD CAUSE:
Volunteer leaders
Steve Schaefer
and Sally Miley

of rowing since his daughter took up the sport while in high school. Although he's never pulled a stroke himself, he has witnessed rowing's transformative power as his daughter and her friends learned to work as a team.

"You can't have any superstars in the boat or it will go around in a circle," he says. "Everybody has to pull hard in order to win."

Both Schaefer and Miley hope to see cancer survivors discover the same sense of camaraderie.

"A lot of them didn't get an opportunity to participate in team sports," Miley says of pre-Title 9 cancer survivors. "This will be a fun opportunity for them to participate in something they weren't able to do before."

Schaefer and Miley started developing We Can Row early last year. Schaefer had been looking for a way for the rowing club to provide more community service beyond its youth and teen rowing instruction. When he learned about the We Can Row program, he thought it would be a good fit for Madison, a city with an esteemed rowing history and renowned medical community.

He also thought it was a good way to bring the benefits of rowing to individuals who had specific medical and physical concerns that might not be addressed in an introductory rowing program geared toward the general population.

In addition to proving her swimming competency, every participant must complete an assessment with a physical therapist prior to getting in a boat. The latter will provide her with an individualized workout plan (including warm-ups, cool-downs and stretches) that addresses any specific post-treatment concerns or conditions, including upper-body weakness and lymphedema (swelling of the arm, breast and chest).

Sue Abitz, executive director of the Madison-based Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation, which operates wellness retreats for survivors, looks forward to the launch of We Can Row on Lake Monona. She says breast cancer survivors often struggle with body image and maintaining overall wellness after treatment, and she welcomes other opportunities that allow women to incorporate fitness into their lives.

The benefits of exercise on breast cancer rehabilitation and survival are well documented, and the American College of Sports Medicine recently reported that post-treatment physical activity is critical



THEY CAN ROW: Breast cancer survivors will soon join rowing enthusiasts out on the lakes this summer.

to restoring strength, flexibility and endurance. All are integral to maintaining overall wellness and staving off other health problems (such as heart disease or diabetes) that can result from being inactive or overweight.

"This gives women one more way to exercise in a safe way," Abitz says.

Baker, who walks and bikes, is no stranger to physical activity. And she's not a complete stranger to rowing. She took an introductory class fifteen or so years ago, and she took immediately to the sport. She liked being on the water. She liked the camaraderie of a team. But the timing was wrong. "It was hard to manage with little kids," she says. "You either went at five in the morning or five at night, which wasn't really workable."

That program was not exclusive to cancer survivors, as is We Can Row, and Baker is looking forward to being in a boat with women who share her cancer experience. As a twenty-year survivor, she hopes her participation benefits women who have been more recently diagnosed and treated.

"A friend of mine that I work with recently had breast cancer; seeing me almost twenty years out from mine is very encouraging for her," Baker says. "Maybe I can offer that to other women in the class. I don't have a lot of wisdom for them, but it may help to see someone like me who has made it this long."

By Jennifer Garrett is a contributing writer for *Madison Magazine*.

We Can Row Details

SUMMER SESSION: June 9–July 31, Tues. and Thurs., 6–8 p.m. at the Brittingham Boathouse, 601 North Shore Dr. More info: camprandallrc.org or 256-3636.

COST: \$150 (scholarships available)

PROGRAM KICKOFF: June 6, 10–noon, Brittingham Boathouse

OTHER RESOURCES:

Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation: operates wellness retreats throughout Wisconsin for breast cancer survivors. bcerecovery.org

TEAMSurvivor Madison, Inc.: athletic training and participation opportunities, including paddling and signature dragon boat racing, to women with any cancer diagnosis. teamsurvivor.org

Komen Madison Race for the Cure: May 30; 5K run/walk and a 1-mile course. 8:30 a.m., Willow Island at Alliant Energy Center. madisonracefortheure.com

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