

## Steady as the beating drum

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By Lauren Salisbury

The Downtown Disney Area was filled with the sounds of beating drums and cheers as more than 80 teams gathered to compete in the Orlando International Dragon Boat Festival Oct. 19 and 20.



Dragon boat racing dates to ancient China, when rival villages would race brightly decorated boats as a ritual. Today amateur athletes race in teams of 20 paddlers, including a steersperson and drummer, in boats decorated with a Chinese dragon head and tail.

Cast Members throughout property joined the competition on the Disney Dragons team.

"This is a very fun event," said Paul Morris, team captain and Senior Event Services assistant at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. "Our Sports Event team has done a great job allowing this event to grow, and it's something everyone on the team looks forward to each October."

The Disney Dragons received a personal best in each of its three races and set a new record for the fastest Cast Member boat in the event's five-year history. The team placed eighth out of 30 teams in the Community division.

"This was my second year participating, and I always love that team atmosphere," said Allison Stankavage, Alliance Management coordinator. "I was a little sore, but it was worth it in the end."

In addition to the races, there were health screenings and demonstrations at the Walgreens Health and Wellness Village.



The Disney Dragons celebrate at the Health and Wellness Village.



Cultural dances celebrated the heritage of Dragon boats.

The Orlando International Dragon Boat Festival was recently honored with the Best Single Sport Event award at the SportsTravel Awards. With rising interest in the event, this year's festival spread races over a two-day period.

"Going to a Friday and Saturday event created more growth opportunities for the event and for The Walt Disney Company," said Paul Lambert, Sports Sales director and Disney Dragons team member. "I'm looking forward to next year already."