

UNIVERSITY PARK JANUARY 1, 2016 3:59 PM

Dragon Boat classes offered at Nathan Benderson Park in 2016



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BY JANELLE O'DEA
jodea@bradenton.com

UNIVERSITY PARK -- Starting in 2016, Nathan Benderson Park will offer its first class for community members. A dragon boat paddling class is an example of the kind of "everyday programming" Nathan Benderson Park officials hope to bring to the rowing venue in the future.

"As we approach the end of 2015, we are extremely excited to be launching new and fun opportunities to work on our health and fitness right here at NBP," Zach Hilferding, Benderson Park program manager, said in a news release. "We cannot wait for this program to grow and to introduce more courses and camps in

the near future."

According to the release, the classes intend to teach the basic skills necessary to participate in the sport of dragon boating. The park staff intend to offer intermediate and advanced dragon boating classes in the future and hope to assemble teams as well.

The class will start on Jan. 9 and Nicole Rissler, chief operating officer of Suncoast Aquatic Nature Associates Inc., which operates the park, said each class can accommodate between 12 and 40 people. After the park hosted the International Breast Cancer Paddlers' Commission Dragon Boat Festival, Rissler said they saw increased interest in the sport of dragon boating.

A Sarasota dragon boating team, the Survivors in Sync, participated in the festival last October. They were one of more than 100 teams from more than 10 countries paddling in the festival, and 2014 was the first time the International Breast Cancer Paddlers' Commission Dragon Boat Festival was held in the U.S.

According to the International Dragon Boat Federation website, dragon boaters often recognize the 1976 Hong Kong International Races as the kickoff for the "modern era of dragon boat racing." Since the federation formed in 1991, more than 90,000 people in Canada and the U.S. have picked up the sport.

The Survivors in Sync team calls Nathan Benderson Park home. Member and founder of the team Angela Long hopes the community will love learning to paddle and competing on a team with like-minded others.

The introductory price per person is \$60, and those interested in learning more or registering can visit www.NathanBendersonPark.org or contact Hilferding at Zach@sanca.us.

Janelle O'Dea, business reporter, can be reached at 941-745-7095 or follow her on [Twitter@jayohday](https://twitter.com/jayohday).



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