

The Villages® DAILY SUN

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MONDAY

JULY 14, 2025

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES

By Jammal Cutler

For 15 years the Grandmasters Dragon Boating Club has set a standard of excellence for what the sport is supposed to exemplify. The club, comprised of twelve teams, will celebrate that tradition of distinction on Friday at Lake Sumter Landing.

DRAGON

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The group will commemorate its anniversary with festivities including races from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Lake Sumter followed by a casual get-together at the Lake Sumter pavilion. John Rohan, the Executive Director of Recreation & Parks, and Club President Cheryl Moran, will signal the start of the races with a air horn from the pontoon boat acting as the grand marshals of the event.

The three to four events will be fun chicken races where combined teams featuring two 20-person boats which will sprint toward a floating basket. The first to successfully toss a rubber chicken into the basket will be the winner.

Moran is currently in the midst of her fourth two-year term as president and has been associated with the club in various roles since 2011. The club started out small before blossoming into one of the premier dragon boating clubs in Central Florida over the last 15 years. Throughout this period, the club has participated in thousands of races and has won many gold medals.

"Sarasota is the premier race venue in Florida," Moran said. "We've been abroad to places like Canada, Hong Kong, and Italy."

Looking ahead, the club is anticipating the opening of their new facility in Eastport, scheduled for later this year. The new development will feature a boathouse designed for storing dragon boats and kayaks and will include a central, 1,000-meter lake where practices, races and competitions are expected to be held. This expansion is expected to enhance both training and competitive opportunities for current and future club members.

"When the facility opens, we're hoping we can expand the program," Moran said.

One person who has witnessed much of the club's growth firsthand is Leatherneck Warriors men's captain Ken Loomis.

"It's quite an accomplishment," said the Village of Marsh Bend resident. "We're one of the largest dragon boating clubs in the country."



Rachel Govola | Daily Sun

Robin Lockerby, left, of the Village of Winifred, and Laraine McDonald, of the Village of Collier at Antrim Dells, practice with the Leatherneck Warriors and Sparta 70 dragon boat teams on Aug. 13, 2024, on Lake Miona. They were two of the team members who competed in the Can American Club Crew Championships in Canada.

We're going to have a great celebration. I'm looking forward to the races — we're going to mix up the teams; that's something that will be interesting to see."

Silver Dragons captain John Townley, an eleven-year veteran paddler, has also observed the club's transformation over the years.

"I'm really excited about our

Eastport opening," said the Village of Springdale resident. "Something like this will bring a lot of visibility to the club. We have around 400 members now, and I think over the next

couple of years more people will be interested in it."

Gail Long, a Village of DeSoto resident and captain of the Eastport Sun Dragons, appreciates the camaraderie and atmosphere the dragon boating community provides. Her team is very close and participates in various activities outside of the water, including environmental clean-up efforts.

"I've been a part of the dragon boating community for the last five years," she said. "I've seen the club as a whole grow. Our team is close-knit, and we're very much a part of each other's lives. We do meet and greets and tryouts to make sure everyone is compatible."

Over the last fifteen years, the club has overcome significant hurdles, and Moran hopes that momentum will carry forward into the next fifteen years as new members join and contribute to the club's legacy.

"The goal for the club is to expand programming," Moran said. "We want to develop additional home teams at Eastport and expand membership."

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This is a great article by Jammal Cutler in the Daily Sun. The picture included shows the Leatherneck Warriors' Women's team with Robin Lockerby and Laraine McDonald in stroke positions. The Sparta 70 team merged with the Leatherneck Warriors in 2025, nor representing a team of over 70 athletes from the Villages, aged 53 – 85. The Leatherneck Warriors sent a 10 person mixed boat to Montreal for the Pan American Club Crew Championship earning Bronze medals in 200 and 2000 meter competitions.