

Survivors put backs into it

An Auckland cancer survivor finds paddling a dragon boat is a hugely rewarding experience. *Renee Jones reports*

Surviving breast cancer has given Paula Sheahan a new energy that she and 20 other women like her are using to advantage. Paula is a founding member of the Pink Dragons dragon boat team, a crew made up entirely of breast cancer survivors.

The 53-year-old owner of Hammerheads Restaurant and former lawyer, who's found support among her teammates, is excited about the Auckland Dragon Boat Regatta coming up on March 17.

"Being in a team of women who have all faced, and continue to face, similar challenges, has helped me find the positives within the otherwise negative experience of cancer."

The team started racing in the physical and competitive sport a year ago and are loving it.

"When you're doing something like

dragon boating it takes you out of yourself because, when you're doing it, you can't think about anything, just concentrating on keeping up with everyone else and just going for it."

Paula found a lump in her breast three years ago.

Within a week of going to the doctor she was in surgery for a partial mastectomy.

She describes the following weeks as a rollercoaster, having chemotherapy, then being separated from her two sons when she went to Melbourne for several weeks' radiotherapy.

Paula also lost her sister in a battle with breast cancer.

"Just about everybody knows someone who's had breast cancer. It's a bit of an epidemic really."

Pink Dragons coach Graeme Rountree began dragon boating when his mother set up Auckland's other



PINK DRAGONS PADDLER PAULA SHEAHAN HAS FOUND SUPPORT AMONG HER CREW PHOTO: BRADLEY

breast cancer team, Busting with Life.

"I think it's fantastic what it does for them, and that's why I set up a second team, because I can see the benefits."

"Seeing the excitement in the paddlers and especially their first regatta,

the adrenalin they have through them."

■ For information about Pink Dragons or to donate www.pinkdragons.org.nz