

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

A Colorful Boat, Camaraderie and Changed Lives - Paddling with the Lethally Blind Dragon Boat Team

Can paddling a boat change a life? For the crew of the Lethally Blind dragon boat team, the answer is a resounding "Yes!"

In June, NWABA sponsored two crews from the Lethally Blind dragon boat team in the Portland Rose Festival dragon boat races. This is the seventh year that the team has raced, making a huge difference in the lives of paddlers who are blind or visually impaired.

Each of the vibrant, long boats, which have roots in ancient China, holds 20 paddlers. In addition, a caller, a steersperson and a flag catcher, all of whom are sighted, are on board. About 75% of the Lethally Blind team members are blind or visually impaired.

Ten weeks to learn synchronized paddling plus power, speed and endurance

Each year, the team has approximately 10 weeks to train paddlers for the Rose Festival races, team captain Char Cook reports. "The key to successful paddling is timing," she says. "It is synchronized paddling with every single paddle going into the water exactly at the same time. For sighted team paddlers they teach to watch the paddle in front of them. We teach people to feel the boat's timing."

Under coach Sue Fischer, Lethally Blind has won awards four out of the past seven years. Both crews metalled in their divisions at the 2014 Rose Festival races, which attracted 70 teams. "Because Sue believes that blind people can achieve greatness on the water,

and because Northwest Association for Blind Athletes supports this belief, we believed, too, and we did it!" Char says. "And we're not finished yet!" In 2014, 50 people signed up to paddle for Lethally Blind.

Lethally Blind is giving many team members the opportunity to experience sports for the first time. "Many people say this is the first time in my life that I felt I could be an athlete or be part of a team environment which I desperately wanted to do," Char says.

Camaraderie and competition - a "phenomenal" feeling

No one on the team knows more about the life-changing impact of dragon boat racing than she does. "The sport of dragon boat paddling has impacted my life in a way I didn't expect," says Char, who has Retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease that causes total blindness. "I remember walking down the dock to a practice in 2002 and thinking 'I may not have vision for much longer.'"



Athletes training for the Portland Rose Festival Dragon Boat Races

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Billy Henry

THANK YOU!

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Billy Henry

Dear Friends,

What a spring this has been for NWABA! We produced a busy spring full of tandem bike rides, goalball games, track and field events and many other activities.

As the need for NWABA's life-changing programs has continued to grow, our Board of Directors recognized that we need to do more to improve the quality of life for people who are blind. With that said, I am very excited to share the following announcements with you:

Strategic Plan – NWABA's Board of Directors approved our new strategic plan at the June Board Meeting. The plan lays out goals to diversify and expand programming; enhance community involvement in all areas of the organization; increase outreach efforts throughout the region and develop a more diversified funding base to maintain current programs and support growth initiatives. Each of these goals supports our intent to develop a presence in every identified area of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

Director of Programs – Thanks to a generous \$150,000 grant from the KMR Group Foundation (see separate article for more information), NWABA's first Director of Programs will start in August. This individual will work in tandem with our Board and me to drive the growth of our mission-impact for children, youth and adults with visual impairments.

ARTICLE CONTINUES ON PG. 7

LET'S STAY IN TOUCH

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A Colorful Boat, Camaraderie and Changed Lives – Paddling with the Lethally Blind Dragon Boat Team

“For the past 12 years the paddling has been the one thing I depended on to keep me focused on life and hope rather than total blindness. I never in my life expected to be an athlete. But it happened. Now my joy is to help someone find this sport as I did. The camaraderie and competition, the team feeling and hard workouts, and the striving to be better is phenomenal.” Char was one of the first two blind paddlers to compete at the international level, as a member the Team USA in the World Dragon Boat Games in Berlin.

As is a teacher at the Oregon Commission for the Blind, she helps others adjust to sight loss including cooking and social skills. “When I meet someone who is struggling with vision loss, my first response is to get them on a dragon boat,” she says. “Paddling can work magic for people and take them away from despair and bring hope and a drive to win both on the boat and in life.”

Finding an accepting team and an instant second family

Lethally Blind team member Adrienne Lattin has felt that “magic.” She only knew a few people when she moved to Portland to attend law school. “When I joined Lethally Blind, I had an instant second family,” she says. “They are a team who accepts everyone for who they are. They have seen me at my best and my worst and many of the members have supported me through very difficult times. Being on a team where most of the people know about the ups and downs that blindness adds to everyday life without asking brings an added ease to being around the people.”

“There are 20 other people with you in the boat when the rain is coming down and you can barely drag your paddle through the water because there are so many waves. But being on a team is also about the support and friendships that survive even off the water,” she says.

For team member Chari Chauvin, the experience has been equally life-changing. Over the past two years, her vision has radically decreased due to severe stage Glaucoma. As she says, “I realized my world was narrowing. I sold my car and bought a bike, then sold my bike and bought a cane, all within six months.”

“As a member of Lethally Blind, I’ve had the opportunity to connect with others in the vision loss community. The varying experiences with vision loss among my teammates, their wealth of knowledge, and amazing strength has opened doors for me and continues to help me maintain a positive outlook through some difficult adjustments,” she says. “Paddling for Lethally Blind has allowed me the chance to be successful at a team sport, and gives me confidence and courage. I’ve experienced incredible camaraderie and caring, like none I’ve ever had before. I don’t think I can truly put into words the pride I feel in my ability and in my team.”

NWABA, which has supported the Lethally Blind team for three years, agrees. “We support Lethally Blind because it allows participants of all ages who are blind or visually impaired an opportunity to improve their health and wellness, build friendships and gain the confidence to succeed in other areas of life,” says NWABA’s Executive Director, Billy Henry.

Dragon boating is one of the fastest growing water sports in the world. Locally, it’s making a difference for a team of paddlers one person, with a desire to move the boat and life forward, at a time.



Lethally Blind paddling in sync for their upcoming race.

Champions Legacy Giving Society

Become a Champion. Leave a Legacy.



Student experiencing the joy of running with the help of a guide.

Northwest Association for Blind Athletes is excited to announce the creation of the Champions Legacy Giving Society to recognize individuals who have chosen to support the organization through a planned gift. Your membership in the Society will ensure that individuals who are blind or visually impaired will always have the opportunity to build confidence and self-esteem through participation in

sports and physical activity. Below are several ways you can become involved:

Bequests - Through a bequest, you can designate Northwest Association for Blind Athletes to receive cash or property from your will. Your bequest can be a percentage of your estate or a specific dollar amount. This is a very simple way to make a lasting impact on the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired.

Beneficiary Designations - You can select Northwest Association for Blind Athletes as the beneficiary of your retirement account or life insurance policy. This is another easy way to improve the quality of life for individuals with visual impairments while receiving a tax-deduction.

Securities - Designating stocks, bonds, mutual funds and other securities to Northwest Association for Blind Athletes allows you to avoid capital gains tax while ensuring that our programs are making a difference for a lifetime.

Real Estate - Gifting your property (i.e. home, land, or commercial property) is another excellent way to support Northwest Association for Blind Athletes. In addition to receiving a tax-deduction, you will be ensuring that people who are blind always have an opportunity to be active. These are only a few ways that you can get involved. We will be spotlighting various planned gift options in future newsletters. Champions Legacy Giving Society members will be recognized annually in our annual report and will also receive special updates on upcoming program activities.

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Please contact Billy Henry,

*Co-Founder/Executive Director, at 360-448-7254 or
bhenry@nwaba.org for more information*

about how you can get involved.

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Northwest Association for Blind Athletes provides year-round programming to individuals through five-specialized programs. Below are a few highlights from recent program events.

Paralympic Experience Puget Sound

On April 26th we hosted our annual Paralympic Experience in Burien, WA. Students from across the Puget Sound had an opportunity to participate in Tandem Cycling, Goalball, Judo, and various track and field events.

OR Track Meet

On May 16th students and teachers from across Oregon came together in Canby for the 2014 State Track Meet. Athletes participated in short and long distance racing, throwing events, long jump and beep baseball.





NWABA Receives \$150,000 Grant from KMR Group Foundation

NWABA is very pleased to announce that KMR Group Foundation has awarded our organization a grant of \$150,000. This three-year grant, the largest that NWABA has received, will support the addition of a Director of Programs and will have a major impact on the impact of the organization.

“With the growth of NWABA from serving six students in 2007 to more than 1,000 individuals of all ages in 2013-14, it’s critical that we have the professional staff on board to support our programs,” said Billy Henry, NWABA Executive Director. “This will allow us to dramatically increase our impact on individuals who are blind or visually impaired.” With the assistance of a part-time program assistant, all organizational aspects are currently led by the Executive Director. Billy will continue in his leadership position, focusing on strategic planning, administration, fundraising and program development. The new Director of Programs will enhance and expand current programming, develop and implement new initiatives and grow strategic partnerships with other agencies.

“We saw NWABA as a fit when we had the privilege of getting to know Billy Henry, his work and the vision of NWABA,” said Marty Rifkin, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the KMR Group Foundation. “Introducing individuals with visual impairments to sports and physical activities creates opportunities to build self-confidence and incorporates healthier lifestyles for those who wouldn’t normally have the chance to participate. It was clear early on that there was strong alignment between our missions, and KMR Group Foundation was pleased to be able to participate with such a quality organization.”

KMR Group Foundation’s mission statement is: “Because the potential to excel is in every child, KMR Group Foundation wants to give children an equal opportunity for success and development through the creation and sponsorship of innovative programs and academic scholarships. The KMR Group Foundation encourages healthy lifestyles, good nutrition and a love of learning. We commit our time and energy to providing support to local children and meeting them at their point of need.”

A three-year grant will greatly expand NWABA’s capabilities while making the organization more sustainable. “In the near term, we want to ensure our initial grant allowed the current programs of NWABA to be sustainable,” Marty Rifkin reported. “We look forward to a longer term partnership where we can help create scalable programs that can be introduced throughout all NW regions and beyond.”

Thank you, KMR Group Foundation for your tremendously important gift to NWABA and for your support of blind and visually impaired individuals in the Northwest.



We saw NWABA as a fit when we had the privilege of getting to know Billy Henry, his work and the vision of NWABA.



MARTY RIFKIN, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the KMR Group Foundation.

Welcome, New Board Members!



Karen Holterhoff
Director
KMR Group Foundation



Courtney Barker
VP, Marketing & Communications
Corwin Beverage Company



Ben Campbell
Digital Strategist
The Columbian



Dean Watanabe
VP, Oregon Region
Washington Trust Bank

New Office - On July 1st, we moved our office to a larger and brighter location. The new building is only a few blocks away from our old location, but is a huge step forward toward achieving our vision. It will support the addition of future employees, allow us to store additional adaptive equipment onsite and be a central hub for our volunteers and athletes.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and athletes, I want to thank each of you for believing in our mission and helping us change lives. We are truly able to make a difference because of you. Please contact me directly at any time by calling 360-718-2826 or bhenry@nwaba.org with any questions.

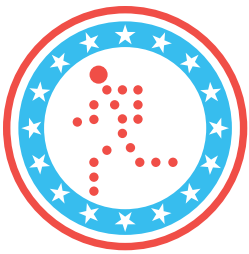
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Billy Henry".

Billy Henry
Founder/Executive Director
Northwest Association for Blind Athletes



NWABA Board Members recently had the opportunity to go Dragon Boating with the Team



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NW ASSOCIATION
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