

Colombia Outreach 2018

AIAB's Adriana Bartoli once again organized a very successful South American outreach — this time to Cartagena de Indias in Colombia, running from 2-7 October 2018. Other members of AIAB who joined the outreach were Judy Crumlin and Dolly Devi from Abreast in Alder Bay, and Bessy Bueso, Elisabeth Villeneuve and Carol McKay from Abreast Deas Divas. There were also 25 other veteran International Breast Cancer Paddling Commission (IBCPC) paddlers — eight from the US (Florida and Indiana), eight from Argentina, and nine from Brazil. The event was attended by 47 Colombian *novatas* (as the novices are called in Colombia), most from Cartagena but some also from Bogota, Buenaventura, and Maicao. Unfortunately the ladies from Baranquilla who had planned to join us were unable to do so due to the passing of a team member.

The days were divided into two four-hour sessions, broken by a long siesta in the heat of the day, as per the Colombian custom. Each four-hour session was again divided into two parts, with half the novatas paddling and the other half concurrently doing dry-land training — then they switched over for the next session. This way each novata had the opportunity to paddle twice per day. The paddles donated by AIAB members, Coach Kamini's teams and the Fort Langley Canoe Club (FLCC) were so useful in the dry-land training and very much prized by the novatas, as were the 80 donated AIAB shirts which were snapped up within minutes. The novatas, and some of the veterans, were so emotional about having a shirt from their heroes in Vancouver.

The crew's PeiSheng BuK (PS-BuK) dragon boat is brand new and the only dragon boat in Colombia. In fact, the Cartagena Dragons are the first dragon boat team in Colombia, let alone the first *breast cancer* dragon boat team in that country. Spanish was the language of instruction and Gemma, a bilingual paddler from Indianapolis, took on the role of drummer/coach. Veteran paddlers were interspersed along the boat so they could give hands-on help to the surrounding novatas.

And that was just the women. Along with us we had some menfolk - there was Andres who will be the steersperson for the Cartagena Dragons until they train their own; Carlos (Adriana's husband), Ted, and Oscar who helped load and unload the boat. And of course, there was our own Dr. Don (and his lovely wife Barbara) who not only helped at the site every day, but also gave a very inspiring talk "Exercise is Medicine for Breast Cancer" at the conference that opened the Outreach Program.

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The first flower ceremony held in Colombia was both traditional and unique. An honoured guest on the boat was "the princess", one of the original members of the Cartagena Dragons who was not strong enough to paddle. While the music was uniquely Colombian, the flower ceremony with pink carnations was, as always, very moving with many tears shed on the boat and on the shore. The local TV station covered the event, including the flower ceremony, spreading the message of life after breast cancer.

Some of the women who came to Cartagena are planning to start teams in their own home towns elsewhere in Colombia. Already in the works are teams in Bogota, Baranquilla, Buenaventura, Maicao, and San Andres Island. Further afield, there has been interest expressed in forming breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams in Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, Chile and Fiji. This is in addition to the many crews already paddling in Argentina and Brazil. None of this would have happened without the steadfast dedication and organizational skills of our very own Adriana Bartoli.

Prepared by:

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AIAB Team. Front from the left: Judy Crumlin, Adriana Bartoli. Back from the left: Elisabeth Villeneuve, Carol McKay, Dr. Don McKenzie, Bessy Bueso, Dolly Devi.

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Cartagena Dragons in training



Colombian novice

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Dr. Don at the conference



Elisabeth Villeneuve presenting Abreast In A Boat

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Colombian novatas and veterans enjoying sisterhood



First Flower Ceremony in Colombia

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On-land training before getting on board



On-land training, practising the responses to commands

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Celebrating sisterhood after the conference with Dr. Don



Husbands...always with us