

Its then-owner, Merryl See Tai, provided the first instructions on paddling techniques and water safety. "None of us really knew what we were doing at the start - it was rub-a-dub-dub and three men in a tub" Dalip laughingly admitted. "But we learned together and became proficient over time." That collaboration between the Kayak Centre and emerging dragon boat teams laid the foundation for a sport that has since become a fixture in Trinidad and Tobago's cultural calendar.

Although Dalip has no Chinese ancestry, his ties to the community are deep and personal. His daughter and son both carry Chinese names, given in honour of a charge d'affaires who once worked at the Chinese Embassy to Trinidad and Tobago and a long-time Chinese friend from his schoolboy days.

The development of the sport is mostly though a unified effort in the continued partnership between the Dragon Boat Federation, Chinese cultural associations, and the Chinese Embassy, which remains a core supporter of the event.

## A LIFE TRANSFORMED BY THE SPORT

Dalip's commitment to dragon boating has gone far beyond casual participation. Once the owner of a successful regional market research firm, he gradually shifted his energy towards developing the sport. "It consumed me," he admitted. "I had to make a choice, and eventually I gave up my business to focus on dragon boating full-time." His wife, who has been part of the sport since the first race, now manages their club, Peking Ducks, but has given her husband full support to pursue his passion.

Dragon boating continues in a second generation in the family as their children grew up participating in it. His daughter once served as a drummer for her school team, while his son now coaches a team and recently travelled with them to Panama to compete.

He now serves on the International Dragon Boat Federation's council, where he oversees the para-division, advocating for the inclusion of athletes with physical and psychological impairments. "My mission is to make sure para-dragons are fully integrated into world championships," he explained. "They should feel as much a part of the sport as any other athlete."

## THE FESTIVAL THROUGH THE YEARS

From its beginnings as a one-off bicentennial celebration, the Dragon Boat Festival has evolved into one of the largest sporting events in Chaguaramas. At its peak, the regatta attracted teams that included high schools, corporate groups, and premier competitive crews. "I remember traffic being backed up all the way to Westmoorings," Dalip said of the inaugural event. "It was that big."



Friendship Cup