

2024 JESSE COON AWARD

Presented to Alana Wilson of the Woodland Masters Swim Team

Below is the nomination letter submitted by Ellen Considine Miller, Past President and Current WMST Board Member.

Jesse Coon was well known as an amazing record-setting swimmer and a passionate advocate for Masters swimming. But most importantly Jesse Coon loved swimming and actively recruited others to join the sport he loved so dearly. Alana Wilson, the current President for the Woodlands Masters Swim Team (WMST), embodies the passion and spirit Jesse Coon portrayed. She is a fervent supporter of all things Masters swimming. The countless volunteer hours she donates in her role as WMST president and her contributions to USMS Gulf Swimming perpetuate and promote the altruistic mission of Jesse Coon.

Alana Wilson is well into her third term as president of The Woodlands Masters Swim Team (WMST) and works tirelessly managing the scheduling and operation of one of the largest teams in the Gulf. She gained valuable experience during the Covid pandemic of 2020, arguably the most challenging time in team history. She worked with pool manager to keep the team in the water, developing vaccine requirements, implementing staggered starts and lane modifications and otherwise keeping the team afloat. Fast forward to 2025, Alana was confronted by a new threat to the survival of the team: the planned 6-month closure of the Conroe Independent School District (CISD) Natatorium.

Facing the prospect of significantly reduced pool time, Alana went on the offensive. With the help of the board, she negotiated alternative pool space for the team, securing indoor pool space at the Klein Independent School District (KISD) Klein Oak pool in addition to three neighborhood pools. Running a team of 160+ swimmers is a challenge all by itself, battling significantly reduced water time is yet another.

With the pandemic now behind us and the team successfully swimming in four area pools this summer, Alana and the WMST board continue their work to increase membership and elevate competition in the area. Like other teams across the country, WMST needed to rebuild numbers after the pandemic. WMST has joined select teams around the country offering an Adult Learn-to-Swim (ALTS) program. ALTS, one of the biggest initiatives of United States Master Swimming (USMS). The program targets people who cannot swim and provides education, outreach, and grants to local clubs to teach adults how to swim. In 2024, WMST expanded to two sites and three days of practice. Former WMST President Steve White coaches the program.

Another big "Alana" push is more competitive events. In addition to hosting the annual Sabine Weiser Annual Swim Meet, WMST hosts numerous events. The 2025 Summer Classic is one such event as was the USMS South Central Zone Spring Championships the team hosted in 2024. The team is vying for additional Gulf meets in 2026. Alana not only organizes these events, she also recruits her dad, Frank, and mother, Deirdre, to support the effort. In the most recent Summer Classic, her young daughter was a timer. Her entire family, including brother Chris, are certified stroke and turn officials. Swimming is in their blood and has defined their lives for a long time.

Alana started swimming at the age of 4. But it wasn't your typical swim start, because Alana grew up in Saudi Arabia. Alana learned to swim with the Dhahran Youth Swim League (DYSL) on the Aramco compound where her parents worked. Not surprising, Alana's success came quickly. She broke multiple national records and was the all-around age-group champion multiple years in a row. Each summer, she would travel with her team the United States to compete in the AAU Junior Olympics, winning multiple events. In 2003, she was awarded the Joel Ferrell Award for Outstanding Performance. As she aged into her teens, Alana won most of her titles stateside, where she attended a boarding school in Michigan. Competing on the high school and local YMCA team garnered her additional success that allowed her to further her swimming career at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas.

As a "Pirate", Alana was crowned a four-time SCAC champion (2x 200 Breast, 400 IM, 100 Breast), broke the SCAC Championship record and set multiple school records. After graduating with a biology degree in 2009, Alana joined WMST. She furthered her education at Nova Southwestern University, graduating with a master's degree in physician assistant studies and continued to swim with WMST.

It's a good thing Alana continued to swim with WMST. Teammates Tom and Carolyn Boak and Laura and Ross Davis had ideas for her- ultimately introducing her to former collegiate swimmer and future husband Jacob Wilson. It was a Masters swimming match made in heaven. The two married in 2014. Fast forward to 2025, the duo now has two kids, Analeigh and Liam. The two children, who are current age group swimmers, are the next generation of this swimming dynasty.

If all of this wasn't enough to garner our attention, consider this: Alana is a survivor of thyroid cancer. Diagnosed in 2020, just as the Covid pandemic was taxing her beloved swim team, Alana underwent radiation therapy and surgery to rid herself of the stealthy disease. Despite weakness from aggressive treatments, Alana showed up faithfully to coach team workouts. Armed with a big smile and determination to keep moving forward, Alana has always put her team first. When teammates Tom and Carolyn Boak relocated to Sacramento, Alana created a handmade quilt for them (yes, she has a quilting business, too). It wasn't just any quilt- Alana made sure the individual blocks were personally signed by WMST swimmers even if it meant showing up at multiple practices to get it done.

We are lucky to have Alana and hope she feels the support of an entire team that adores and appreciates her. Someone who loves swimming with all her heart and donates countless hours to make sure all of us (the entire LMSC) can keep practicing and competing at local meets is deserving of the Jesse Coon Award. It is my honor to nominate a major champion of Masters swimming for this prestigious award. Please give Alana Wilson the opportunity to receive this coveted honor.