



# SPM NEWSLETTER

St. Petersburg Masters | North Shore Aquatic Complex

## A Cautious Sigh of Relief?

It is hard to believe that a year ago, so many of us were recovering from the immediate impact of Helene and Milton, and that there are still those who have not completely recovered. For now, it seems that we can breathe a cautious sigh of relief for our area, as we send aid and hold our island neighbors in the Caribbean close to our hearts.

One thing about our team is that there is always someone on the go, doing something noteworthy. It is not easy to keep track of all our activities, but the Facebook team page on Facebook and Instagram account do an excellent job of sharing activities. However, if you see something your teammate is doing, or if there is an experience you would like to share yourself, please don't be shy and let me know.

I hope you enjoy the beautifully written articles in this issue. Sarah Swoch never disappoints when she writes about her travel adventures, virtually taking us with her, with her stunning photos and sensory descriptions. Alison Hayden and Chris Stickle always make a swim meet more than just a swim meet. They are our most consistent Nationals competitors. Issue after issue, Alison also acts as our tour guide wherever her destination may be. Steve Freeman is frequently found on deck officiating at USA and Masters meets, but here he writes a heartfelt and inspirational article about his experience as a Special Olympics official.

Kathy Selles, the officers, and our Board are always hard at work for us, planning events, weighing decisions, addressing issues as they arise. Thank you all for keeping us informed and keeping our team running smoothly.

Sadly, Gary Bastie is leaving his position as assistant coach. Here he gives a few more tips, and expresses gratitude to the team. Hopefully, he will continue to share his advice and stories, even if not in an official capacity as coach. Thank you for the heart and positive energy you have given to the team over the years!

And finally, thanks to those who contributed to this newsletter: Gary Bastie, Alison Hayden and Chris Stickle, Steve Freeman, Kathy Selles, and Sarah Swoch. I took some liberties and included photos from events and activities I saw, so thank you to those who posted. I tried to credit the photos as well as I could. Please contact me with ideas, content, or questions at [livia.zien@gmail.com](mailto:livia.zien@gmail.com). Happy swimming!

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## Upcoming Pool Events

**Nov. 15-16 / SCM:** Shark Tank Meet. Sarasota FL. [Information](#). (online entry opens Friday, August 1). *Entry deadline: online entry closes Monday, November 10*

**Dec. 5-7 / SCM:** South Carolina SCM State Meet. North Charleston SC. [Information & online entry](#). *Entry deadline: online entry closes Monday, December 1*

**Dec. 6 / SCM:** Saint Nicholas Meet. Atlanta GA. [Information & online entry](#). *Entry deadline: online entry closes Monday, December 1*

**Dec. 6-7 / SCY:** Florida Senior Games. Temple Terrace, FL. [Information & entry](#). *Entry deadline: entry closes Saturday, November 15. Senior games for 50+. USMS-recognized*

**Jan. 30-Feb. 1 / SCM:** Rowdy Gaines Classic. Orlando FL

**Feb. 14-15 / SCY:** Southeast Zone SCY Championships/Auburn Masters Invitational. Auburn AL

**Mar. 14-15 / SCY:** Dynamo Masters Meet. Chamblee GA

**Mar. 21-22 / SCY:** Bob Beach SCY Championships. St. Petersburg FL

**Mar. 28-29 / SCY:** Snag Holmes Masters Invitational. Jupiter FL

**Apr. 16-19 / SCY:** YMCA Masters Nationals. Sarasota FL., [Information](#).



## President's Corner

by Kathy Selles

The SPM Board had really expected to be announcing exciting news about hiring a new coach this month. Unfortunately, we were recently informed that the candidate who had accepted the SPM job offer, has taken a different, higher paying position. This was really a huge disappointment. However, we did get some other things accomplished that will help as we interview other candidates. We worked with an attorney to create an employment contract for a new coach, to protect the coach and the team. Sarah and Steph have put together a welcome package, and we had plans for a meet and greet in the classroom. All of these plans are organized and ready to go for the next candidate. Going forward, Jeff Gould will be leading our efforts to restart the search. We expect to advertise in swimming related magazines to draw from a diverse group.

The Board has also taken a look at the workout fees. One concern is the difficulty of tracking who swims with the team, how to keep track and bill accordingly. This was tabled for more discussion next month. It was noted that the Bumpy Jones meet offers a lot of relays; we would like to consider offering more relays at our meets.

Planning is underway for the following events:

- Holiday Party, December 6th?? – details will be emailed
- Annual Meeting and election of officers including president and secretary, to follow the Hour Swim – January 18, 2026
- Bob Beach SCY Championship Meet, March 21 & 22, 2026
- Annual Awards Banquet to be held at the St Pete Yacht Club on March 28, 2026

Hey Team! Look what you get - what are the benefits of being a member of SPM?

- Most importantly, to be a member of an exclusive St. Pete Swim Team.
- Dedicated lanes for morning and afternoon workouts at North Shore Pool (and all other pools in St. Pete when necessary). If the SPM team didn't exist, it would be harder or impossible to get exclusive use of the 50-meter pool from 5:30 to 7:00 am weekdays and Sundays.
- Organized team days for special events such as the Hour Swim, 5K and 10K
- Workouts sent to your email for those who pay monthly workout fees.
- A coach (we're working on it)
- Running meets also earns us additional revenue: expenses include rental of the pool and timing systems, providing scoring, awarding high point towels; offering hospitality to officials and timers; and giving appreciation gifts to the officials.
- Membership services through Club Assistant, cost: \$70/month and a percentage of transactions.
- Shirts, caps and other swag for National teams.
- Social outings and holiday parties.
- Awards Banquet, including room rental and part of the catering fee, awards, programs, and raffle gifts.
- Organization of communications with USMS, Florida LMSC, the city, the pool, and the lifeguards.
- Business expenses including: maintaining the website; team registration with USMS; QuickBooks; yearly tax preparation; etc.
- Website, Facebook, and Instagram accounts managed by an SPM Board member.
- Quarterly Newsletters.
- Friends, Fun and Fitness!! Thank you!

Kathy Selles, SPM President

# Coach's Corner

## The Black Line Drill

Lately, I have noted how my "black line drill" has helped a number of you so I'll reiterate it for those who may have missed it. Simply put, this drill has you swimming over the black line on the bottom of the pool. Your hands never touch above that black line. Instead, they stay outside it so that you're pulling a bit wider and not crossing over or under your body. As a result, you'll enter hands above shoulders, not in front of your face, and it will help make your stroke more powerful and straight-lined. Try it and see.

## Time

We all have the same amount of time each day. What differs is how we use it. For instance, if fitness is one of our priorities, then we'll schedule time for it. If not, then it's going to be "hit and miss".

Take the time we have. Who knows how many or few years someone's going to have? Some live long lives while others live shorter spans. But, one thing's the same and it's how we use our time determines the quality of life we'll live. So, let's apply this to the pool.

In any given workout, there's an allotted amount of time in which to do it. Sometimes it's governed by the length of the work out while at other times, it's governed by how much pool time we have to utilize. But, if we have a workout to do and the time to do it, then how is time important?

It's important because either we utilize our time wisely or not. And, how we do some things is usually how we do all things. With time, if we treasure it, then we'll make each workout count. For what? It might be relaxation, unwinding, mental health, physical health, emotional health, a goal in mind (of some sort), you name it. Regardless, choose one or more and apply it to your workouts.

I've seen swimmers come to a workout mentally burned out, emotionally a wreck, physically tired, and you can fill in the blank with your experience as well as mine. But, once they hit the water, something changed. They may have started out slow but, by the end of the workout they'd accomplished something and it wasn't a waste of, you guessed it, time. And, that's the point.

The more we use our time wisely, the more we'll gain from each and every workout, job, relationship, etc. So, why not practice during practice? It makes perfect sense and you can try out your new approach to life in the pool first and, if it's successful there, maybe you have something. It's worth at least a try.

## Planning

"Those who fail to plan, plan to fail" I heard that somewhere and it's been true ever since. The reason is, if we plan ahead, then there's a goal. But, if we don't plan, then things will control us rather than the other way around.

For instance, in the pool, plan each workout in advance – don't just "swim through". Instead, plan to work on something. Plan to be a good lane mate or teammate and plan how you're going to swim that day.

To do that, work on each part of your stroke(s). But, not at the same time. If it's your high elbow recovery, then just that's enough for one session. Or, you might work on timing, pace, speed, turnover, or some other aspect but have a plan. If you do, then you've just committed to success, not a lack thereof. And, that's the way top athletes do it. They have a plan and it's carried out to the best of their ability. Although not perfect, at least they have a plan.



If we write down our plans, then we have a schedule. If we keep on in our heads, same thing, we have a plan. So, learn to take mental notes, mental plans, and see what happens in the next workout. You'll gain more out of it and so will everyone else because plans are infectious.

## Special Thanks

As many of you know, the end of September is when I officially ceased coaching with SPM. A new coach wanted to coach all sessions himself and I couldn't blame him. So, the Board told me in August that my time was up at or around October 1. As a result, I made other plans—namely to buy more tools, equipment and supplies, and ramp up my current St. Pete Duct Cleaning business. And, that's what I did, expecting a new coach, just as most of you were.

SPM is a great team, filled with talented individuals who are high achievers and are the shakers and movers in St. Pete and the greater Tampa Bay area. Although I'll miss coaching in the afternoons and meets, everything changes all the time so there are always going to be new opportunities and experiences for us all. And, I'm no exception. I hope you enjoy a new coach, whoever it ends up being because SPM deserves it.

So, I'd like to offer my special thanks to Fred Lewis, who hired me to coach in the afternoons. I was in my 10th year and it's been quite an honor. As for Fred, he always had my back, was easy to work for, and I always knew where I stood with Him. He's a crystal clear coach, and that's quite a compliment because few are as constant as Fred is. In fact, I don't think he's ever missed a day of practice (except for meets) in all the years I've known him. Again, thanks Fred for giving me an opportunity that lasted for years.

I'd also like to thank the swimmers who make up SPM. It's been an honor working with each and every one of you. And, I mean it. I've learned from you and I hope to have passed along something to each of you as well. But, one thing's for certain. I'm leaving the team in just as good of shape as Patty Nardoizzi left the afternoon group to me. So, thanks to Patty for getting things ready for me and thanks for the swimmers who made the afternoon workouts more enjoyable and intense (in a good way).

During my tenure, we averaged 70 unique swimmers each month during the afternoons. We had a high of 35 and a low of just a few on those miserable days before and after storms. We've had ex-Olympians join us, as well as the USMS Board Members. Plus, I've probably recruited a few dozen from the lap swimming lanes and I think they were all glad to have joined us. The way I see it, the more, the merrier.

So, as I swim off into the sunset, thanks for the memories and friendships. I'll treasure them more than you know. And, don't stop just because I'm not on deck. You'd do me a great service if you improved and kept going. That was always our goal and there's no reason to stop.

## Pool Competitions

### USMS Summer National Championships

by Alison Hayden

I'm always up for an adventure, which is why I traveled cross country to Federal Way, WA for the summer Masters LCM Nationals, held Aug 5-10. I arrived Wednesday which was the day of the 1500, would have loved to do the event but couldn't quite fathom arriving another day earlier. It turned out my flight landed early enough in the day that I could have made it before the final heat. It probably would have been a stellar race as the jet lag wouldn't have had the time to sneak in yet. Well, I was hoping for a very relaxing scenic whale watching tour the afternoon I arrived. Hmmm, the weather was very soupy and visibility wasn't much past your hand so unfortunately that was not going to happen, luckily tickets were just reserved.

Only 3 St. Pete Masters members were on this adventure, Susan Tokayer, Chris Stickle and myself. Despite the foggy weather canceling the whale tour, Chris and I went and checked out the pool, got groceries and lunch. Since the first events for Chris and I wouldn't take place until later in the day



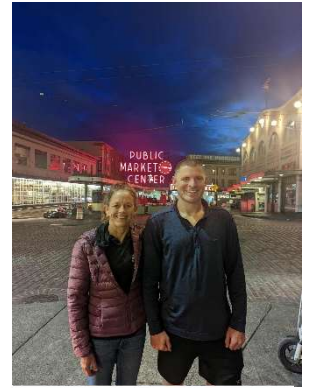
photo: C. Stickle



Thursday, Chris and I decided to have an early dinner and go explore Seattle city. We took a train into the city from a few stations away, parking was a complete nightmare as it is free at the train stations and it was a work day. A very casual visit, we walked and saw all the tourist hot spots; Pike Place Market, the Great Wheel and Space Needle from afar. The weather had cleared up for the evening setting up for a magical sunset.



Sightseeing (photo: C. Stickle)



The first day of competition started with Chris's 50 back, a great race with a 3rd place finish, and Susan took a 6th in the 100 free. Much later in the day was the 400 IM, Chris excelled with a 4th place and decent time drop. My 400IM was not as impressive, swimming at 5:30 pm a day after flying with a 3-hour time difference is probably not ideal. I could barely keep my eyes open as the race approached. I managed a 2nd place finish; however it was not a pretty race and still today I am fretting about it. A massive lead after the butterfly was quickly shortened as the race ran on. The high point of being defeated was meeting a lovely lady from Mexico City whom I became friends with and we ended up racing all the same races except one. My subconscious did not let her defeat me again.



Swimming in the Sound (photo: C. Stickle)

Friday started out with a 200 fly, Chris 5th place, Alison 2nd place and the day ended with a 400 free, Chris 3rd place and Alison 2nd place. It was a decent day, not feeling the jet lag like I did the day before. After our events we went to a nearby park on the sound to take a walk on the water. I actually ended up doing a warm down in the Sound as the warm down pool at the Aquatic center was 85. As I stripped down to my suit immersing into the 52-degree Sound, I was lucky enough to see a seal cruise by. There were several folks at the beach fishing and just hanging out, most astonished as I plunged into the water. Turned out to be a much better cool down than staying at the pool, I was

cool for some time. A yummy exotic drink was enjoyed at a funky bistro next to the beach. The scenery with the mountains in the distance was well worth the price of the drink.

Saturday, lucky Chris had the day off. I started day with a 2nd place in the 200IM and Susan swam a stellar 50 free earning a silver medal. Since I finished the 200 IM late morning we decided to meet

a friend of Chris's in the city. This time we were able to drive all the way into the city as there is more ample parking on the weekends. I couldn't exactly relax and let loose during this experience as I still had an 800 free to be swam at once again 5pm. The trials and tribulations as a distance swimmer. Had an excellent lunch and visited a few more sites we missed the previous day. 5 pm came and went and I was quite pleased with my victory in the 800 free.

Sunday started early with a 3rd place in the 200 back for Chris. Once again, we both had late day races and instead of sitting around we decided to go visit Alki beach, one of the closest beaches to Seattle. A beautiful spot with an incredible view of the city to the north and the Cascade mountains to the west. We explored around and yes of



Alki Beach (photo: C. Stickle)



course we immersed into the sea! It took a lot of convincing to get Chris in the water, however he seemed to enjoy it. There were many open water swimmers coming in and out the whole time we were there. Arrived back at the pool at 2pm just in time for my 200-freestyle, nothing exciting another 2nd place and a decent time. While we were at the beach Susan swam the 50-butterfly earning another silver medal. Last but not least, the men's 800 free, how cruel is that to put that as the ending event. Chris had a very solid race finishing with a 2nd place. Quite a different Nationals for Chris from San Antonio. Since April Chris has been receiving treatment for his injured shoulders. He has followed this treatment protocol to a T and it shows as his times are coming back down to where they used to be. After this event I have fully recognized that I am a true distance swimmer, always have been and probably always will be. So I will not fight it and will work harder at that rather than trying to be something I'm not.

## World Senior Games

Mike Smith won big at the World Senior Games (SCM) in St. George, UT just a few weeks ago. He broke an 11-year-old 50m breaststroke record with an all-time personal best of 35.39! He was also just one tenth of a second shy of breaking the 50m butterfly record. His hard work earned him two golds, three silvers, and one bronze.



(photos: G. Smith, M. Smith)



Post SPM Summer Meet meal (photo: G. Smith)

stroke, and tossed in a 200 IM for good measure. Congratulations to all those who support other meets locally and around the country, representing SPM well throughout!

## Virtual 5k/10k Postal Swim

This year's 5k/10 Virtual Championships took place between May 15 and Sept 15, and SPM as usual, made a strong showing. All individual and relay participants had top ten finishes. It's going to be a busy awards banquet! In the 5k event, the combined team placed 3<sup>rd</sup> with the 6 women placing 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4 men 3<sup>rd</sup>. Macarena Martin Mayor (25-29) and Kern Davis (70-74) led the way with All-American finishes:



(photo: S. Gibson)



## 5k Individuals

Emily Dammer, 2nd place 30-34  
 Stephanie Gibson, 3rd place (40-44)  
 Sarah Swoch, 5th place (40-44)  
 Suzanne Dearworth, 2nd place (50-54)  
 Dawn Clark, 6th place (60-64)  
 Andrew Leone, 3rd place (40-44)  
 Jeff Gould, 7th (60-64)  
 Steve Freeman 4th (65-69)

## 5K Relays

1st M Macarena Martin Mayor, Emily Dammer, Stephanie Gibson (Women's 25+)  
 3rd Sarah Swoch, Suzanne Dearworth, Dawn Clark (Women's 35+)  
 1st Jeff Gould, Steve Freeman, Kern Davis (Men's 55+)  
 1st Macarena Martin Mayor, Stephanie Gibson, Jeff Gould, Kern Davis (Mixed 35+)  
 4th Andrew Leone, Sarah Swoch, Suzanne Dearworth, Steve Freeman (Mixed 35+)

Sarah, Stephanie, Macarena and Kern did double duty swimming the 10k as well, placing 4<sup>th</sup> as a combined team. All-American finishes going to Macarena, Stephanie, and the Women's relay (25+). Sarah Swoch placed 4<sup>th</sup> in her 40-44 and Kern 2<sup>nd</sup> in his 70-74, age groups respectively. Many kudos to our strong distance swimmers!

The 3000/6000yd Postal Swim runs until November 15. Swimmers can find registration information [here](#).



Sarah and mom – Lake Michigan (photo: S. Swoch)

two swimmers splitting the distance. My mom reported some confusion on the beach with swimmers trying to find the relay exit and their relay partners. I ended up in heat 3; the relay was in heat 2. So, I got to swim through a whole lot of people. Maybe I'll train up to be in heat one next year and avoid the fray.

While the competition was fierce, the heart of Big Shoulders remains the community. My dad volunteered as a safety swimmer this year, borrowing a wetsuit from the legendary Marcia Cleveland and joining her team in their red-and-white caps. They patrolled the course with their bright red sticks, ready to

## Open Water Swimming Big Shoulders 2025: Sunshine & Smooth Water

by Sarah Swoch

The week before Big Shoulders is always the same: swimmers watch the wind, the waves, and the water temperatures like hawks, wondering if Lake Michigan will give us a glassy calm or a rollercoaster ride. This year was no different—gusty winds rattled the city days before the race, and rumors of upwelling had some of us imagining icy 50-degree water. But on race morning, September sunshine poured down, the air was perfect, and the lake sparkled at 67–70°F. Smooth as glass, it was one of those rare days when the city skyline meets a calm horizon and you can't help but feel grateful.

This year also brought something new: the inaugural 5K relay, with



(photo: S. Swoch)



help anyone in trouble. Lifeguards, who had been grounded last year due to rough water, were back on the course in rowboats, and the fire department anchored safety buoys from motorboats. The race director and team deserve enormous credit for orchestrating a day where every swimmer was safe from start to finish.

Personally, I was tempted—as always—to sneak in a third lap on the two-lap course. With the water so perfect, it was hard to stop. But I dutifully climbed out, claimed my beer-bottle-opener medal, and turned in my timing chip. I tried to wave to my dad out on the water, who was still scanning the course and chatting with swimmers popping their heads-up mid-race.

The post-race spread was missing its famous ribs this year (a tragedy, if you ask me), but sandwiches did the trick while we gathered to watch the last swimmers come in. Every finisher had a story. One woman at the back of the pack was cheered in by her family, who explained that her relay partner had accidentally swum two laps instead of one. She still powered to the finish, laughing with her cheering squad. Another woman crossed just after the cutoff, radiant in a skirted swimsuit, while her husband, her relay partner, took the blame for their timing. Both swam their 2.5K legs in about an hour and a half, with her edging him out by a minute.

On the beach, I ran into Ted Soltys and his family. Ted has swum nearly every year Big Shoulders has been held, a testament to the race's enduring draw. This year marked my third Big Shoulders finish (even though last year's race was technically cancelled due to high winds).

Big Shoulders is more than just a swim; it's a Chicago tradition, equal parts grit, camaraderie, and celebration of open water. It was one of those perfect race days as the sun sparkled on the lake and swimmers traded stories with medals around their necks.

## Swim for Alligator Lighthouse

Congratulations to Dawn Clark and kayaker Henrietta Szeredi for another successful completion of the



(photos: D. Clark)



Swim for Alligator Lighthouse event in Islamorada. Dawn and Heni have competed in the 8-mile swim over the years, sometimes joined by other SPM swimmers, under both favorable and unfavorable conditions, and sometimes conditions that change mid-race. Regardless, the pair always demonstrates strength, teamwork, and perseverance. Dawn had a great, strong start with the first 4 miles, but the conditions shifted. Heni writes that it was "incredibly hard course coming back with wind and waves but she did it!" And Dawn credits Heni, "Not sure I would have finished without her."

Demonstrating resilience and grit, Dawn and Heni have vowed to return for another race in 2026!

## Upcoming Pool Events

**Jan. 18: Tampa Bay Frogman Swim (3.4 miles). Tampa FL. [Information](#).** Swimmer registration closed: maximum entrants reached. *USMS sanctioned: NO*

**Apr. 3: USMS Open Water Sprint Championships (1 mile). Sarasota FL. [Information](#).** Entry deadline: entry closes Monday, March 30 or when maximum entries reached. *USMS sanctioned: YES*

**Apr. 4: USMS Open Water Long-Distance Championships (5K). Sarasota FL. [Information](#).** Entry deadline: entry closes Monday, March 30 or when maximum entries reached. *USMS sanctioned: YES*

**Apr. 11: Deluna Open Water Swim (.6 mile, 1.2 miles, 2.4 miles). Pensacola Beach FL. [Information & registration](#).** *USMS sanctioned: NO*





(photo: S. Dearworth)

## In Pursuit of the Triple Crown of Swimming

Congratulations to St. Pete Masters swimmer Suzanne Dearworth! Starting her swim near midnight on July 31, Suzanne completed the grueling 21-mile Catalina Channel Swim from Catalina Island to Rancho Palos Verdes, California in 12 hours and 12 minutes, on August 1. Water temperatures dropped below 60°F as she finished.

Almost one year ago to the day, Suzanne completed the 20 Bridges Manhattan Island Marathon Swim. Now, with the Catalina Channel Swim, one of the most challenging open water swims in the world under her belt, she is one swim away from earning the Triple Crown of Swimming, consisting of the English Channel, the

Catalina, and the 20 Bridges Swim Around Manhattan.

Other St. Pete Masters swimmers who achieved the elite status include Ron Collins (September 10, 2013) and Chris Burke (July 23, 2015).

We are rooting for you, Suzanne!



(photos: S. Dearworth)



## Live Wildly Open Water Team Challenge

On October 25, World Swim Day, SPM swept Live Wildly's 4-mile relay team challenge in Pass-A-Grille Beach. The rules of the event are designed to promote teamwork, pacing, strategy, and perseverance. Each team can have between 3 and 8 swimmers. The course is a quarter mile loop. Each swimmer completes one loop at a time and tag the next teammate, but no swimmer is allowed to swim consecutive loops or swim more than 3 loops, and each teammate must participate.

Congratulations to the winning team, Salty's Sea Monsters (Stephanie Gibson, Sarah Swoch, Cameron Chambers, Karen Westerman, and Celeste Brandon), and Shorts and Flippies (Dawn Clark, Jeff Gould, Stase Michota, and Ian Tarrant) who finished 2<sup>nd</sup>.



Salty's Sea Monsters (photo: S. Swoch)

## Swimming the Bozburun Peninsula: A Turkish Island-Hopping Dream

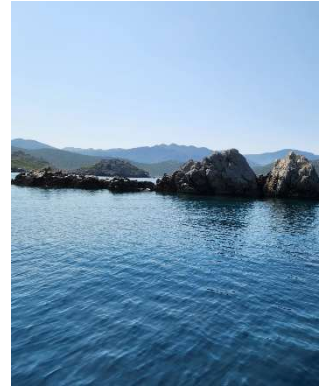
by Sarah Swoch

The Bozburun Peninsula in southwest Turkey feels like it was made for open-water swimmers. Limestone cliffs drop straight into turquoise water that deepens to sapphire blue, and ancient ruins hide on rocky islands scattered across the coast. It's a place where every swim feels like an expedition, every meal is like a feast, and every turn of the coastline reveals something new.





Our home for the week was the Tymnos Hotel, a beautiful and adorable hotel with herbs in planters along tiled walkways. The dock in front of the hotel was where guests ate breakfast and enjoyed views of the bay. Bozburun Harbor served as a dock for a traditional Turkish gulet captained by Ramazan and his wife, Selma. Each morning, we sipped tea on deck while they guided us to our first swim site. The swims each had their own



surprises around rocky islets with crumbling ruins, goats asking for snacks, past schools of fish flashing silver in the sunlight, and alongside sea turtles gliding gracefully through the clear water.

After our morning swims, Ramazan would grill lunch on board—fresh, simple, and utterly perfect. We'd then have the option to nap on deck or explore the nearby islands. Naturally, I chose exploration. I climbed rocky outcrops where goats roamed freely and snorkeled through shallow passes between tiny islands, spotting sponges, sea grasses, and the occasional coral.



While most of the group rested after lunch, I was too enchanted to sit still. With snorkel and fins in hand, I slipped back into the water, circling islands or chasing the flicker of fish schools. One afternoon, I convinced our guide Ozzy to take me back to an island I hadn't quite finished exploring. Laughing at my persistence, he ferried me in the inflatable boat for a quick solo swim around its perimeter. Later, he admitted it was good reconnaissance for future Strel trips—an island no one had swum before (at least on a Strel trip). Exploration accomplished! The next day, Ozzy did his reconnaissance swim and swam around Olive Island, ironically, the only island without an olive tree.

By the end of the week, I had even established my own morning ritual: slipping into the water before breakfast to swim a one-mile loop around a nearby island proudly flying a giant Turkish flag. I'd return just in time for a breakfast spread that still makes my mouth water: figs drizzled with honey, tangy cheeses, fresh bread, yogurt, eggs, herbs, tomatoes, cucumbers, and jams. Every meal was so fresh.

Evenings were for strolling through quiet towns and sampling Turkish cuisine—grilled seafood, savory kebabs, and endless mezze plates. My favorites were minty tzatziki, lemony beans, and sea beans tossed in olive oil, garlic, and lemon. There was always fresh fruit for dessert—sometimes turned into the creamiest ice cream made with goat's milk.



The group was small and diverse: two lifelong friends from Germany, a couple from Hong Kong (from the UK and South Africa), and a young woman from Italy living in the UK. Our guides—Ryan in the motorboat (a



motorbike adventurer from the UK), and Ozan (a Turkish local) in the kayak—balanced safety with freedom. Unlike stricter swim tours, Strel gave me the space to zigzag between groups, follow sea turtles, and squeeze in “bonus swims.” They even kept us fueled with water and gummy bears at every rest stop.

Outside the swims, I fell in love with the rhythm of the peninsula. Shipbuilders in Bozburun quietly crafted fleets of gulets in the harbor, mountains stood tall behind the coastline, and trails attracted local runners. We could see the Greek island of Symi shimmering on the horizon from specific swim sites.

Turkey is vast, with rock climbing, hot air balloons, and ancient ruins waiting elsewhere. Part of me wishes I had seen Troy or walked the line where Europe and Asia meet. But honestly, I was glad to trade the significant sights for small islands and quiet peninsular towns. For me, the joy was swimming the ins and outs of the coast, exploring what others might pass by.

And who knows? Maybe next time I'll swim the Bosphorus Channel. For now, Bozburun gave me something even better: the chance to slow down, to swim with sea turtles, to sip tea between swims, and to experience Turkey one bay, one island at a time.

## Outside the Lanes

### Top Gun Triathlon

The 25<sup>th</sup> year for the Top Gun Triathlon Sprint triathlon was held in Fort DeSoto Park on August 2. Laura Albee and her team of Will Albee and Mark Michaels placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the relay. First place bragging rights went to Cynthia Newton in the Individual Female Age 55-59 division, and Steve Bossert placed 9<sup>th</sup> Individual Male Age 55-59 division. In addition to the sprint triathlon (0.25-mile swim, 10-mile bike, and 3.1-mile run), the event also offered a Duathlon (1.5-mile run, 10-mile bike, 5k run) and Aqua-Bike (0.25-mile swim and 10-mile bike) options.



(photo: L. Albee)



Steve Freeman and Mike Zabel in Sarasota (photo: FL-LMSC)

## Officiating at Special Olympics

by Steve Freeman

I am a USA swim official and have been for approximately 25 years. I am a stroke and turn judge which means I only watch for stroke and turn violations. While I have officiated many kinds of meets, it was not until four years ago that I began officiating Special Olympics Swim meets. The first one was in Clearwater at the Long center. The Special Olympics have different areas of the state like USA swimming. The meets that I have worked at are the area that compromises Pasco, Pinellas and Hillsborough (I think). In the fall they have a State meet.

It is very fun to officiate. The competitors are of all ages from approximately 10 years old to 60. They are fierce competitors. Their competition would rival anything we see in US Masters or USA Swimming. There are both intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and a combination. Some start from the starting block, some start from the wall standing and some jump in and start in the water. At least every stroke is swum. Most of the swimming is done in 25's and 50's. There are a few who do an IM and they have a few who do distance swims like the 400, 800 or thousand. There are also relays. In

addition to coaches, parents and friends, there are typically quite a few volunteers, usually from large local organizations. Everyone does a great job.

On September 26 and 27 of this year I worked my first State meet in Sebastian Florida. There were hundreds of competitors, or so it seemed. There was both long course meters and short course meters. For the first time I saw what is called assisted events and flotation events. The assisted events are those events where the swimmer has someone actually hold onto them or accompany them while they swim. There is a race where they wear lifejackets. There is a race

where they kick from the kickboard. This was also the first time that I saw what is called a Unified Team. That is typically done in a relay. They will have one swimmer without a disability to round out the relay. For example, they will have a special Olympic swimmer for the back, breast, and fly and then a unified swimmer for the freestyle. The unified swimmer actually practices with them. I saw the essence of fierceness and competitiveness in one particular race. This one swimmer was stronger on one side than the other and she was doing a 25m backstroke. She kept going in circles because her right arm was so much more powerful than her left. A unified swimmer jumped in and assisted and motivated her to complete. When the race was done the Special Olympic swimmer just kept saying that she had finished the race and had finished with the help of the unified swimmer. One of the coaches, whose niece was a unified swimmer, started crying because of this intense expression of success by the special Olympic swimmer. That can make it all worthwhile.

I truly enjoy working the Special Olympics. There is a lot of joy. Everyone is having a great time. And I mean everyone. Sometimes, the competitors express their happiness during their race. For example, I have seen breaststrokes swimming with their heads fully out of the water smiling and waving to me. You do not see that in any other competition. When they are done, they typically want a high five or a handshake. That joy, that competitive spirit, and their immense enthusiasm combine to make it a very fun experience.



## Welcome Gus!

Congratulations to Tori and Don Sigley and big sister Savannah! Augustus Howard Sigley was born on September 25 at 1:33am. 7lb 11oz, 21" long.

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