



SPM NEWSLETTER

St. Petersburg Masters | North Shore Aquatic Complex

Springing into Summer

Nationals kicked off the quarter with a splash. Wrapping up the SCY season, Alison Hayden and Chris Stickle traveled to San Antonio, TX, to compete at the USMS Spring Nationals. Meanwhile, Cheryl Kupan rallied ten teammates to join the Westport Water Rats at YMCA Masters Nationals. Chris Stickle also led a group of six swimmers to Washington, D.C., for the IGLA Championships, where the team earned an impressive 2nd place in the Small Teams Division and 11th overall. We recently hosted another successful Summer LCM Meet, expertly directed by Brooke Bowman.

Sarah Swoch took on two major open water events in the Catawba River—read about her exciting races, encounters with top open water swimmers, and the fascinating history of Mt. Holly. Alison Hayden never fails to deliver when it comes to adventure. She shares highlights from USMS Nationals, the June Krauser Summer Splash, and her Swim for a Mission 10k.

Curious about the multisport events your teammates have been tackling? From the St. Anthony's Triathlon to the Dunedin Rotary Triathlon and the Tampa Bay BABES Triathlon, there's plenty of activity. Dawn Clark dives into her training, experience, and camaraderie at Ironman Chattanooga 70.3.

Gary Bastie gives advice about planning workouts while navigating our summer storms. President Kathy Selles and the Board have been working hard on the search for a head coach, reviewing meet fees and logistics, and managing all the details of running a team.

Finally, with shared dedication and discipline, Chelsea Nauta shares a heartfelt reflection on her interview with Michael Phelps.

Thank you to all who contributed to this newsletter: Gary Bastie, Dawn Clark, Jeff Gould, Alison Hayden, Chelsea Nauta, Kathy Selles, Chris Stickle, Sarah Swoch, and Karen Westerman. Please share your activities, photos or kudos for a teammate! You can send them to me at livia.zien@gmail.com. The next issue will cover July through September. I hope you enjoy reading the stories shared by our team members and seeing the smiling faces in the pictures as much as I do. Happy swimming!

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Upcoming Pool Events

July 25-28 / SCY: National Senior Games. Des Moines IA. [Information & entry.](#) Entry deadline: online and paper entry closes Thursday, May 15. Senior meet for 50+. Will be USMS-recognized

Aug. 2 / LCM: Dog Days of Summer. Augusta GA. [Information & online entry.](#) Entry deadline: online entry closes Monday, July 28

Aug. 6-10 / LCM: USMS Summer Nationals. Federal Way WA. [Information & online entry.](#) Entry deadline: online entry closes Monday, July 14

Sept. 14 / SCY: Gainesville Senior Games. Gainesville FL. [Information & online entry.](#) Entry deadline: online entry closes Sunday, August 31. Senior meet for 50+. USMS-recognized

Sept. 21 / SCY: Rob Curry Pancake Pentathlon. Clermont FL. [Information & online entry.](#) Entry deadline: online entry closes Wednesday, September 17

Oct. 4 / SCY: Spooky Fall Classic. Augusta GA. [Information & online entry.](#) Entry deadline: online entry closes Monday, September 29

Oct. 12 / SCY: SWAGtoberfest Meet. Gainesville FL. [Information & online entry.](#) Entry deadline: online entry closes Sunday, October 5

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



President's Corner

by Kathy Selles

The board has been busy with the search for a new coach. Our ad attracted five individuals; four of those submitted resumes. Members of the board and a few members of the team participated in a zoom interview with one of the candidates, and have offered him the position. He has extensive experience coaching both kids and adults. Research was done to develop a formal job description for the SPM coach, and we have begun work with an attorney to put this into contract language. Many thanks to Val Valle for the time she has put in on this!

We have conducted our review of the annual awards banquet held at the yacht club. The board was pleased with the facilities and the meal offerings. The location was convenient, and the board members appreciated being able to attend and enjoy the banquet without the work of meal prep. We will likely keep the same arrangements for next year. A document has been developed for future boards with detailed instructions to cover the timeline, duties and preparations for the banquet, whether at a venue like Bayfront Tower or at a restaurant such as the yacht club.

In April, the board discussed fees for our meets, comparing to other meets in the area. We voted to increase our fees to \$50/day and \$75 for the weekend. There was no cost for relays. Chris Stickle again organized the "Jeans 50" race for our LCM meet!

Have you made a plan to swim the 5K and 10K? The two team dates remaining are August 17, and September 14.

Thank you! Kathy Selles, SPM President

Coach's Corner

Summer Swimming

Ah, summer swimming. It means hit or miss with workouts due to thunderstorms. But, it can also mean changing your outlook on workouts. Here's why. When we don't know what's going to happen, what do we do? We often worry needlessly. So, rather than worry about what's ahead in the forecast, why not develop some alternatives, just in case.

For instance, how about starting a weight program, running, walking, treadmill or stationary bike, etc.? If practice is called off, do some of those things. In fact, take the stairs, not the elevator, do a little walking, get up off that EZ chair and think about what you might be able to do, not what you can't do because of the weather. Oh, but there's more.

Be flexible and remember, some is always better than one. If rain's going to happen in 45 minutes, then swim fast for 45 minutes. At least you got in a workout. I think you get the point. Don't let the weather dictate your summer swimming. Be creative and change your routine during these months and you'll be a lot fresher in the fall, when the rainy season's over.

Blast From the Past

Unlike most of you, I can still remember how goggles didn't exist when I swam as a kid, in high school, or even during my first year of college swimming. They hadn't been perfected for the swimming community as yet. Oh, there were goggles, but not for competitive swimmers---only pearl divers.



As a result of goggle-less swimming, we could never see the walls clearly. So, we missed a lot of flip turns. As for our eyes, they burned, even after we'd finished swimming. And, our eyes remained sensitive for the rest of the evening with chlorine burns. But, somehow we survived.

One evening practice, and it was during my college swimming, someone brought in a "new" set of goggles. They were hard plastic, no foam or padding, just hard plastic "Swedish" goggle type. So, we all had to try them. Oh, they worked, in that the chlorine didn't sting but, they hurt your eyes. So, we didn't buy or use any.

Flash forward just a short time and companies started making goggles that had foam padding for the eyes. Finally, we could see clearly underwater, they didn't hurt, and we could go home and study after practice and not see halos around every light, constantly wipe sore eyes, and have the gunk around our eyeballs in the mornings when we woke up. Yep, goggles have arrived and you know the rest.

Eating the Pie

If you were going to eat a giant pie, how would you do it? You'd cut it into pieces and start with just one piece. If you continued over hours, days, or weeks, eventually that giant pie would be gone. And, that's my point.

When it comes to our swimming goals, practices, learning new skills, getting back in shape, etc., life is like that giant pie. If we try to eat it all at once, we'll fail, get sick, and quit eating entirely. But, if we chip away at it, then we'll finish whatever "pie" we're working on. Simple concept, easy application, and it makes sense.

So, the next time you face a practice, new skill, or getting back in shape, think of it as a giant pie. You can't eat it all at once but you can chip away at it and eventually, it gets eaten. Nuff said.

Pool Competitions

USMS Spring National Championships

by Alison Hayden

Once again San Antonio hosted the USMS spring nationals April 24-27. Three members of SPM masters were entered: Chris Stickle Alison Hayden and Kern Davis. Unfortunately, Kern was unable to attend, possibly scared away from the weather forecast, which was thunderstorms every day of the competition. This forecast even had meteorologist Chris Stickle excited, he was excited at the high possibility of tornadoes and was telling me we were going to go chase it. I was game. Luckily the weather cooperated, a bit overcast, warm but not hot and some drizzle here and there. Perfect weather for a meet.



(photo: A. Hayden)

Like always there is always some sort of disaster that occurs when I take these short trips to a meet. Chris and I were joking around what it would be this time. It was my drive to the airport. I woke up very early in the morning to catch a 600am flight. Left the house earlier than expected, had a parking reservation at a lot just north of the airport. I had about an hour and a half before my flight as I neared the airport, the road to the parking lot appeared to be closed, literally. There was a police officer stationed at the closure, I pulled my vehicle over and ran up to ask him what was going on. No information, pretending he didn't speak English and basically ignored me. I took another road through the airport, reset my GPS for directions to the lot, nothing. The only way to get there was through the closed road. Me being the stubborn person I am tried a few different ways, nothing worked. It is now less than an hour till the flight leaves. Panic took over, if I miss this flight then I am screwed since it is Spirit airlines. I saw a cluster of hotels near the airport; I pulled the car in, parked in the lot and called an uber for the one mile to the airport. Ten minutes later Uber showed up, I got dropped off with 35 minutes remaining, boarding started. I figured I got this...got to security and there were about 100 people in line. I stood at the back of the line for about 5 minutes, no way was I going to make it. I then approached the person in front of the line, explained the misfortune I had had earlier and miraculously they told me to go ahead. T minus 17 minutes till takeoff. The gate was all the way at the end. I somehow started running like I was in a 100-meter dash. Arrived

at gate as the agent was closing the door, whew!!! I guess it was meant to be, and the most exciting part is my disaster is over which means it will be a perfect meet and weekend.



Once I arrived in San Antonio I went and visited the local zoo as I waited for my side kick Chris Stickle to get to town. The zoo was filled with many interesting animals and crying kids. One interesting fact is the San Antonio Zoo has the most species of snakes in the country. There were a lot of them, over 100 species.

The meet went very well for me and considering Chris Stickle had a shoulder injury, his performances were incredible. For

me the meet started with a distance event (1000) and ended with a distance event (500). Two golds were achieved in these events. The 500 was incredibly exciting as I was neck to neck in the last 100 with the lady next to me. I was somehow able to pull ahead and put 1.5 seconds on her, I surprised myself. I also swam the 200 fly, 200 free, 200 IM, and 400 IM placing 3 silvers and a bronze. Chris had 2 top 5 performances in the distance events, 2 top ten placings and 2 12th places. Not too shabby considering there were over 100 men in that age group.

When not in the pool we spent a lot of time next to our hotel at a dog bar, sizing up all the canines and trying to make them bark. Meals were spent with our friends James and Kelly from Buffalo, NY. Lots of laughs and good food was had. I believe we had Mexican twice and some excellent Italian food. We ventured to the river walk for an early dinner on Saturday night, which was always a good time.

It was an excellent trip and there were no more disasters after almost missing the flight. By the way I was expecting my car to be towed from the hotel lot, but when I arrived home on Sunday there it was right where I left it! Stay tuned as Chris and I head to Seattle next month with our friends from Buffalo for the summer USMS Nationals, should be an epic time. Hopefully we will get a day out at the Olympic National Park.

YMCA National Masters Meet



forces with Cheryl and the Water Rats at the Rosen Aquatic & Fitness Center, with the women's team placing 2nd, the men's 4th, and finishing 4th overall.

The 35-39 Women's age group was led by powerhouses Allison and Sarah who delivered sweeps in every event they competed in together. Allison was national champion in all 11 of her individual events, and Sarah was national champ in 4 of her 10 individual events, placing second only to Allison.

Every year, Cheryl Kupan pulls together a stellar group of swimmers for her former team, the Westport Water Rats, to compete in the YMCA National Masters Meet. This year was no different. From May 8-11 Allison Retotar, Sarah Swoch, Paula Texel, Courtney Chubb, Sherri Bogue, Susan Tokayer, Geraldine Jacobson, and Mike Smith joined



The risks of falling asleep at a met, Karen (photo: S. Swoch)

Paula also had an excellent meet finishing with 5 national championship wins and silver in her remaining 3 events. Courtney, Karen, and Susan Tokayer all had several first-place finishes under their belts as well. Congratulations to everyone for a fantastic team effort!

Full results can be found at the following [link](#). SPM results can be found [here](#).



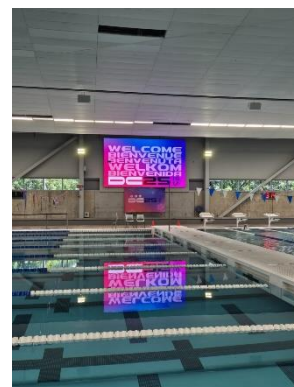
Dana Greene and myself.

There were many good swims by all of our swimmers. For the ladies, Dana was 3rd in her 100 FR; 2nd in her 200 FR; 1st in her 400 FR & 1st in her 1500. We were all very proud of Dana for finishing her 1500 as the race was quite the challenge with her coming out of surgery recently and not having much practice time before this meet. Allison was

IGLA DC25 Recap

by Chris Stickle

SPM has much to take pride in from this year's IGLA championship in Washington DC at the Long Bridge Aquatic Center. We had 6 swimmers participate over the course of 6 days of swimming including one day of open water racing in a very chilly 66-degree Potomac River at National Harbor. SPM scored very well finishing 2nd place in the small team category and 11th place overall out of 41 teams. Swimmers participating included Cam Chambers, Jim Esposito, Steve Gavalas, Allison Retotar, and



3rd in 50 BR; 2nd in 100 IM, 2nd in 50 BK, and 3rd in 100 BR. Her best swim came in the 100 BK where she finished 1st and took 7 seconds off her entry time with a 1:15.34.

For the men, Steve Gavalas was 4th in 50 FR; 2nd in 100 FR; 6th in 400 FR; 4th in 200 FR. Steve was able to drop time in all his events and worked with Chris on improving his starts which really helped his swims. Jim Esposito had a very impressive meet with a 6th in 50 FR, 5th in 200 BK; 2nd in 50 BK; 3rd in 100 IM; and 2nd in 100 BK. We can always count on Jim to place well in BK and sprint races, and this time was no different. Cam continues to impress us in all his distance swims scoring all golds in his age group with a 1st in 200 FR; 1st in 400 FR; 1st in 200 IM; 1st in 800 FR; 1st in 1500 as well as a 1st in the 1.5k Open Water Swim. Cam's 1500 FR was fast enough to score a new IGLA meet record for the 35-39 age group with a time of 17:11.49. As for me, I was recovering from injuries in my shoulders but was very encouraged with my swims. I was 2nd in 100 FL; 3rd in 200 BK; 2nd in 200 FL; 4th in 100 FR and 5th in 100 BK and 3rd in the 3k Open Water swim. Having to swim a 200 Fly with a partially torn rotator cuff is not an experience I would recommend, but I was very glad to finish with a pretty respectable swim of 2:30.92.

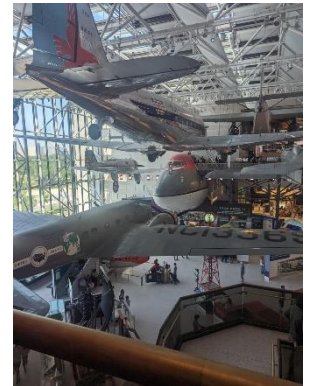
For this year's IGLA, we had a day solely dedicated to relays and SPM was able to field 6 total relays with 4 Mixed and 2 Men's. SPMs goal was to score max points so our decision was to elect to swim the 400 FR Men (2nd). 800 FR Men (1st) along with the 400 FR Mixed (1st); 800 FR Mixed (2nd); 200 FR Mixed (1st); 400 Medley Mixed (3rd).



While there was much to talk about at the pool there was much to do outside the pool with many social events and sightseeing opportunities. Some of the highlights of the week were meeting with other swimmers for Happy Hour at Kiki Night Club along with an afternoon Tea Dance at Club Crush. Both clubs featured electric music and lots of good vibes and drinks that were well deserved after swimming. On night three, Dana, Allison and I enjoyed walking the national mall and seeing the monuments all lit up. It was quite a lot of walking and we recommend taking an E-scooter or bike, but seeing picturesque scenery made the walk worthwhile. Night four featured IGLA Night of Drag where participants played Bingo with prizes from some of DC's most famous drag queens. Allison was lucky enough to tie for a win in Bingo and was called up on stage where she received a prize of a free drink.

Nights five & six featured the always popular Water Polo Ball and Closing party where the swimmers and water polo players alike combined for more fun dancing the night away.

But that's not all! Cam, Allison, Dana, and I were able to take some time to see some of DC's most popular museums on the National Mall. I think my favorite was seeing the Air & Space Museum as we enjoyed looking at all the planes and space exhibits. The Smithsonian Museum of Natural History and the Botanical Gardens were quite fun to explore as we spent hours looking at all the various exhibits in each museum. I would highly recommend going to DC's National Zoo. Much like the museums on the mall it is free to enter



and has just about everything you could want to see with the pandas and elephants being our favorites. Lastly, after the competition was over Steve and I were glad to march in the World Pride Parade on the final day with team DC as we got to spray the crowds with water guns on a very hot afternoon.

Next year's IGLA competition will be the Gay Games held in Valencia Spain from June 27-July 4, 2026. We would love to have even more SPM swimmers come join us as this meet is open to ALL. Registration is already open and can be found at www.gaygamesvalencia2026.com. Results can be found [here](#).

15th Annual June Krauser Summer Splash

by Alison Hayden

On June 28-29, the June Kauser LCM swim meet was hosted by Swim Fort Lauderdale at the Hall of Fame pool. Directed by friend, super star swimmer and new meet director Blake Woodrow. I spend my summers up in the northeast and figured it was a good time to escape the pine tree state, swim in my favorite pool and visit my side kick Chris Stickle.

Saturday, we ran into some delays as early that morning the power in the area went out which triggered the pool pumps to shut down. It is illegal to swim in a pool that is not properly pumping. The meet was delayed an hour and a half due to this, at one point we were not even sure if there was going to be a meet. Due to this delay, the last event of the day, the 400 IM was swam in the blazing hot sun at 230pm in the afternoon. It took everything I had to get to the blocks, only three of us showed up. I was really wondering if I was going to pass out, drown... as I stepped on the block my foot and calf cramped up and I got really dizzy. I have to say everything was against me and somehow, I found the will power to finish and not too far off my seed time. It just shows that anything is possible.

On Sunday, Chris and I showed up to swim the 1500 which was already in progress, and we were told we had not checked in, so we were not in the event. Chris looked like he had seen a ghost. I laughed. Luckily someone moved to an earlier heat so there was one spot, since Chris is injured I took it. A friend of mine was walking to the blocks to swim the 1500 in the next heat, saw Chris and asked him if he wanted to swim in her place. So lucky us we got to swim -- only to be lapped by meet director Blake Woodrow twice.

The meet was a success, both of us got high point awards in our age groups. It was a quick trip, so nothing epic was done. We ate some wonderful food, had a lot of laughs, and visited with other swimmers.

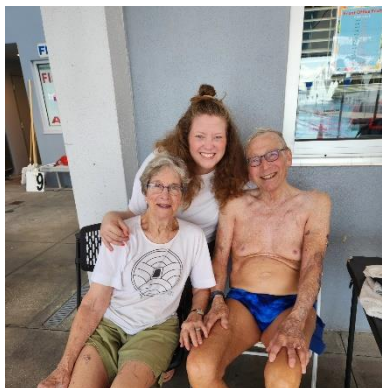
Oh and yes, I did have a disaster on this trip. As I boarded my flight and sat back in my seat I smiled to myself thinking what a wonderful disaster free weekend. Nope... the plane backed up to the gate and flight was canceled due to some made up bad weather somewhere. Well, that was the icing on the cake for me flying Spirit Airlines, that ship has sailed. I ended up having to buy a new ticket and spend another night in town.

Thanks Fort Lauderdale, always a good time, and we'll be back!

Results can be found [here](#).

St. Pete LCM Championship

Another fast SPM Long Course Championship is in the books! With lots of fast swimming including one world and several FL-LMSC records set. Meet Director Brooke Bowman never disappoints, running another smooth and efficient meet. We appreciate you, Brooke!



Susan, Catherine, and Peter (photo: S. Swoch)



Paula, Tabitha, and Sarah

Congratulations to Emily Dammer who won high point in the 30-34 Women's age group in her first meet with SPM. Congratulations to other winners, Howard Cheung, 25-29 Men; Emily Dammer; Cameron Chambers, 35-39 Men; Sarah Swoch, 40-44 Women (with 84 points - the highest high point); Paula Texel, 55-59 Women, Jeffrey Gould, 60-64 Men; Nancy Kiernan, 70-74 Women; and Kern Davis, 70-74 Men.



Thanks, for the photo, Dan and Kevin! (photo: L. Zien)



Charlotte (photo: S. Swoch)



Many thanks to our timers, Ali Jalili, Greg Stanek, Hank Robinson, Laura Kaleel, Linda Felton (Sunday's raffle winner), Livia Zien, Mitchel Hoffman, Nany Kiernan, Patty Nardoizzi (Head timer), and Paul Kurtz and his sons Nolan and Oliver (Brooke thanks you for the reinforcements!), and Steve Freeman. And double thanks to those who volunteered both days: Christine Gould, Lisa Flanagan (Head Timer), Mija Lee, and Miles Williams (who also stepped in to serve as head timer, and Saturday raffle winner). And of course, thank you to our officials Charlotte Petersen, Kevin Mooren, and Dan Nardoizzi for keeping us legal!



Head timers, Patty and Lisa (photo: S. Swoch)



Jeans 50 (photo: Jeff Gould)

The meet concluded with the 2nd (can we say annual now?) Jeans 50 race, brainchild of Chris Stickle, inviting fun and creative ways to swim down a 50-meter pool. Karen Westerman and Tabitha Jacobus-Brandt made their way down the pool sharing a pair of jeans in 1-minute. How do you top that? We'll have to see what is in store for them next year. More pictures to come in the next issues.

Results can be found [here](#).

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Meet Round-up

Karen Westerman, Mike Smith, and Cheryl Kupan met up during the two-day SCY Villages Senior Games on April 23-24, 2025 at the Laurel Manor Regional Recreation Center. Karen had a golden meet with a triple 8. She finished 8 events with 8 gold medals, and 8 meet records, sporting her new Deboer 3DIUM tech suit. Great swims by Mike Smith winning his 50 free, 50 fly, 50 and 100 breaststroke events, and Cheryl Kupan with a gold in the 100 fly and silver in the 100 IM. Villages Senior Games results can be found [here](#) and in the [USMS database](#).



Sporting her new suit with 8 golds and 8 records (photo: K. Westerman)



On April 27, Kern Davis represented SPM at the 5th Annual Show Your SWAG Meet hosted by the Swamp Water Aquatics Gainesville. In his new age group, Kern won all 5 of his events: 500yd free, 50 and 100yd breaststroke, and the 100 and 200yd IM events. Results can be found at [this link](#).

The frequent travelers, Chris Stickle and Alison Hayden were at it again in May. Chris flew to Atlanta, GA to swim in the Chastain Park Athletic Club Masters Swim Meet. He won the 200yd breast and finished 2nd in 50. On the 18th, Alison participated in the New England Master's 2nd Annual The Monster Meet in Salem, NH winning her 100 and 200yd free, 100yd back, and 200yd IM, and getting silver in the 50yd free.

The all-woman team kicked off the LCM season at the Annual Bumpy Jones Classic in Sarasota the weekend of June 7-8. Sarafina Wilson competed in her first USMS event, winning the 50m backstroke. Congratulations to Tabitha Brandt, Courtney Chubb, Karen Westerman, Cheryl Kupan, Susan Tokayer, and Geraldine Jacobson for a stellar meet! Results can be found [here](#).



SPM ladies at Bumpy Jones Classic (photo: K. Westerman)

Open Water Swimming

O'CRUD 10K – Catabwa River, Mt. Holly, NC

by Sarah Swoch

The weekend of May 3, I took on the O'CRUD 10K—short for Open-Water Catabwa River Up and Down—in beautiful Mt. Holly, North Carolina. The water was a brisk 70°F, and the vibe among the 10K and 2.4-mile swimmers was incredibly welcoming. It felt like an open-water family reunion. In line before the race, I heard familiar names and instantly recognized a few fellow marathon swimmers: Paula Croxson, Louise Twining-Ward, and Leslie Hamilton (of ["Tits Out Under the Verrazano"](#) fame). We'd crossed paths at other events, and it was surreal to reconnect mid-race check-in. I even bumped into a swimmer who had been behind me in line at Bridges to Bluffs last year!



The course was both scenic and sobering, with hurricane-damaged homes lining parts of the river. The original start





location had been turned into a staging area for hurricane response vehicles, so race organizers made a last-minute change—shifting the start just down the road and slightly shortening the course. Duke Energy generously turned off the dam for the race, allowing swimmers to make the upriver journey without being swept back downstream. (Hopefully, the dam will be back on for the next race in June, which runs downriver only.)

Despite swimming against the current at the start, I made good time heading up to the dam. It was pretty awe-inspiring to finally look up and see it towering overhead. But then came the

turn. As I rounded the buoy and began the return leg, the wind had shifted—and so had the river. What I expected to be a fast downstream finish turned into a grind. My pace slowed by **three minutes per mile**, and the effort ratcheted up.

Things got competitive on the way back, especially with one swimmer nearby. It turned out to be none other than Louise, who I'd swum around Key West with! My kayaker, Brenna, was an absolute star—navigating choppy water, handling my feeds flawlessly, and even taking pictures despite the wind.

In the end, all that racing effort on the way out paid off: I snagged **3rd place overall!** Totally worth the post-race leg cramp.

After the swim, I joined a fun group from **CIBBOWS** (Coney Island Brighton Beach Open Water Swimmers) for lunch. The camaraderie was amazing. Within minutes, we were swapping stories of sea lice, jellyfish stings, monsoon swims, shark encounters, and ultra-distance races around the globe. One swimmer and his kayaker joked that we all sounded like salty war vets. Maybe we are—but with more lanolin and sunscreen.

Many of us were using O'CRUD to scout the course for the upcoming **Hell or High Water 10-Mile** race later this season. Consider this the "short swim" warm-up.



Hell or High Water: Swimming History on the Catawba

by Sarah Swoch

On a warm, calm morning in Mount Holly, North Carolina, I waded into the Catawba River for the inaugural 10-mile Hell or High Water Swim. This journey traces the path of one of the state's most catastrophic natural disasters: The Great Flood of 1916.

This annual marathon swim isn't just about endurance, though the distance certainly challenges that. It's also about connecting with history, community, and the river that reshaped a region. Over a century ago, the Catawba raged with an unstoppable force after two hurricanes—one from the Gulf, one from the Atlantic—converged to dump record-



breaking rainfall across western North Carolina. Entire homes, sheds, cotton bales, and even railroad bridges were swept away.

In Mount Holly, the river crested at an estimated 45.5 feet, though the measuring gauge itself had been torn away. The floodwaters carried hundreds of cotton bales, chicken coops, haystacks, and even the contents of a casket factory, sending coffins eerily floating downstream. A massive warehouse was lifted from its foundation and swept away in a single surge.



Swag bag gifts donated by Mt. Holly Historical Society



Just north of Belmont, as floodwaters rose on a Sunday, railroad workers placed coal cars on the double-track bridge to anchor it against the current. Freight trains continued to roll across, even as the structure buckled under the pressure of water and debris. At

around 5:30 p.m., 19 men were on the bridge when it collapsed, just as a train full of peaches crossed.

Ten of them died in the collapse—some crushed under steel, others swept away by the flood.

Today, those coal cars still rest on the bottom of the river, along with unburned anthracite coal, and, according to local historians, the bones of those lost in the flood. The sound of the bridge breaking was later said to have been like a pistol shot cracking through the air—a single instant marking tragedy.

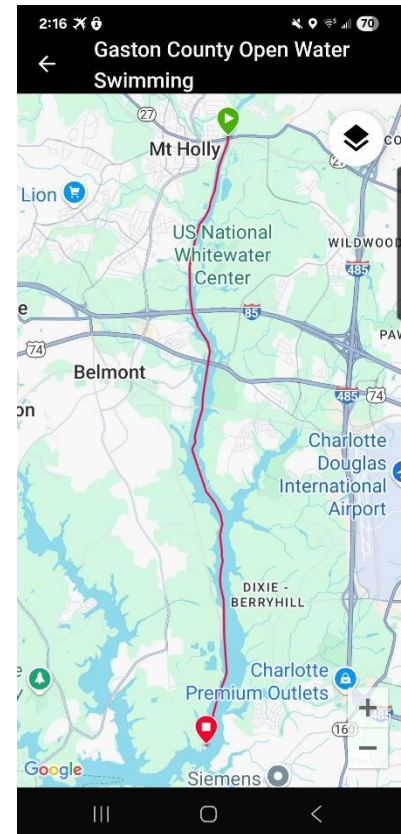
Today's swim is a gentler tribute. Instead of chaos, the Catawba offered a well-marked course with boat and kayak support, scenic views of trestles and bridges, and a chance to reflect on the region's resilience and rebirth. A special thanks goes to race director Doug Miller for the smooth logistics and well-supported swim. Most importantly, the pink panther shark bus with a kegerator, reminding us it's all water under the bridge. Many thanks to the Mt. Holly Historical Society, sharing powerful stories from 1916 and more recent floods in 1940 and after Hurricane Helene. Their stories transformed the swim into a journey through time.

Reflections from the River

Swimming through the Catawba that morning felt like moving through layers of time. As I passed beneath the old railroad trestles and the current bridges that span the river, I thought about the people who had once stood where I swam—rail workers, flood survivors, families watching their homes drift away.

The day was stunning, and the water was a perfect 75 degrees. Though the Catawba is often called "muddy," it shimmered in shades of green-brown, with clearer stretches in between. Anglers lined the banks, casting lines into the current. I didn't spot any fish myself, but marathon swimming legend Kathleen Wilson said she managed to *pet* a few mid-stroke—just one of the many reasons she's in a league of her own.

Fortunately, the river had been cleared of debris after Hurricane Helene, so there were no hazards to dodge—aside from plenty of floating sticks. I had the ultimate secret weapon on board: my cousin Austin, a kayak



Kayaker and pink panther shark bus bar tender

support extraordinaire, athletic trainer, and orthopedic physical therapist. He was constantly scanning for the best lines, negotiating requests from police to hug the shoreline, and juggling race director guidance—all while applying his sunscreen and feeding me every 30 minutes. Honestly, I think he did 99% of the work without a bathroom break.

By mile 8, I realized I was gaining on a few swimmers ahead. I got excited, picked up the pace, and dropped my mile time by three minutes. By mile 9, I caught one of them, and with Austin's expert direction and encouragement, I finished just a minute behind second place, earning third overall. Undoubtedly, I couldn't have done it without Austin's calm, calculated support.

We were also treated to a talk by the Catawba Riverkeeper, who shared the story of the watershed and an update on the river's health. We were relieved to learn that the water was clean, the enterococcus levels were low, and that recent rains had caused some dam releases, giving us a bit of current to help us along. Duke Energy, which operates several plants along the river, is transitioning from coal-powered facilities to a combination of hydroelectric, nuclear, and battery storage sites, offering hope for a cleaner future for this historic waterway.

Community, Camaraderie, and Champions

As with many marathon swims, the people make the day as much as the water. It was a joy to reunite with Leslie Hamilton and her family, whom I first met at O'Crud last month. This event also marked my yearly swim with Megan Howson, a ritual that's become one of my favorite parts of summer. I crossed paths again with Natalie Cowart, a kindred swim spirit. We bumped into each other in line at Bridges to Bluffs and quickly realized we'd shared the water in Key West, Charleston, and several others. We have more races lined up together in the coming months.



Reunion with Megan Howson



But perhaps the most incredible honor of the day was swimming alongside Kathleen Wilson, a true legend in the marathon swimming world. Kathleen is the race director of Swim Around Charleston, and her accomplishments are extraordinary: from crossing the English Channel in 2001 to tackling the Kaiwi Channel in 2012 to a double-length swim of the Sea of Galilee in 2022. Her resume spans decades and continents; hearing her stories firsthand while sharing the same water was nothing short of inspiring.

Hell or High Water reminded me that in swimming—as in life—there's strength in honoring the past, joy in the present moment, and power in the people who lift us (or paddle beside us) along the way.

Congratulations to all participants!

Swim for a Mission 10k

by Alison Hayden

On July 13 I returned to Bristol, New Hampshire to swim in the Swim for a Mission 10k open water swim. This race is a fundraiser for military Vets and I had such an amazing time last year I showed up again. The lake and scenery are absolutely stunning, crystal-clear water with a



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brehtaking mountain view in the background ... This swim is probably my favorite 10k swim out of all the swims I've competed in. One reason being you don't need a kayaker, I feel so free like this, and I am self-prepared with my own feeds. The scenery is breathtaking, and the best part is that after the race there is delicious hot food, plunge tub, sauna and free massages. What else can one ask for? There are also a few world-class breweries in the area.

The race did not disappoint!! The start was calm unlike last year when people were swimming on top of each other. Some high school fellow from Bolles school in Florida took off like a rocket. I stuck to my plan and casually swam the first 5k with a rather hard 5k to the finish. Around 3k I swam stroke for stroke with another man till about 7k where he slowly faded. Later after the race he stated he could no longer hold the pace. I ended up first female and 3rd overall, another male youngster was barely ahead of me. Last year the winners had to do pushups. I did not get the chance this year, however the overall male got to do pushups. I decided I wasn't going to stand for this. I went up and challenged the young 16-year-old from Bolles. I ended up with 66 pushups to his 37. A challenge coin was awarded, see picture. I couldn't stop, next I made a challenge for pullups. I succeeded with that challenge of 26 pull ups and granted another coin.

If you are looking for a fun swim and a great place to vacation this is it! There is also a 1k, 5k swim and relay divisions. I know I will be back again!

Upcoming Open Water Events

July 26: Georgia Games Open Water (1/2K, 1K, 2.5K, 5K). Acworth GA. [Information & registration](#). USMS sanctioned: NO

Sept. 7: Swim Hobbs Island (1-mile, 2-miles, 5-miles) Huntsville AL. [Information](#). USMS sanctioned: will be

Sept. 13: Swim for Alligator Lighthouse (8-miles). Islamorada FL. [Information & registration](#). USMS sanctioned: NO

Sept. 13: Lake Murray Dam Swim (2.2-miles). Lexington SC. [Information & registration](#). Entry deadline: early registration closes Friday, September 5; late registration closes Wednesday, September 10. USMS sanctioned: NO

Sept. 28: Bridges to Bluffs (10K). Knoxville TN. [Information & registration](#). Entry deadline: registration closes Sunday, August 31. USMS sanctioned: YES

Oct. 4: Swim the Suck (10-miles). Chattanooga TN. [Information](#). Swimmer registration closed (sold out). USMS sanctioned: YES

Outside the Lanes

St. Anthony's Triathlon



Laura and the Tri Mamas (photo: L Albee)

Congratulations to the SPMers who participated in the St. Anthony's Triathlon in Vinoy Park on April 25-27. Dawn Clark did double duty, placing 2nd in the sprint in her division *and* as part of the Clive and the Magnificents placed 1st in the Grand Coed Relay division. Congratulations to Steven Bossert who finished 11th in the sprint. Russ and Karen Westerman also competed in the individual sprint distance event, placing 7th and 13th respectively. Karen notes that her finish time was a PR, and that their finish times were just 2 seconds apart, even though they did not race together. A couple who trains together! And finally Tiffany Weidner led her Ladies from the 80's team to a 1st place win in the Team Female division.

For the Olympic distance competitors, Andrew Leone finished 6th in the Male VIP division. Proud dad watched his young 11-year old daughter compete in her first triathlon in the Meek and Mighty just the day before. Jesse Morenus finished 19th in the Male Open division. Jeff Gould and his The Young and the Listless team placed 13th, and Laura Albee put on her running shoes and helped her Tri Mamas team finish with a bronze.



Ironman Chattanooga 70.3

by Dawn Clark

How it all started!! It was New Year's Day 2025 at Upham Beach. Andrew, Ian and I had just finished an open water swim. We sat down for a coffee and breakfast when the St. Pete Runners Club runners had just finished their run and had also sat down for coffee and breakfast. I remember vividly sitting with Jonathan, Claudia, Patty and a few others. We were talking about "what was next" on the race calendar. For them it was Chattanooga 70.3 in May. For me, it was the Tampa Bay Frogman Swim on Jan 19th. By the end of our breakfast, I was somehow talked into signing up for Chattanooga. I committed, but my bike training couldn't start until after the Frogman Swim. From February 1st until race day, I never missed a Saturday ride at the Suncoast Parkway (50 miles or more each week). I also committed to twice a week doing a spin class at the gym. Never missed those either. My run training was limited due to back issues, so I did a few HITT treadmill workouts a week. I figured that was enough to get me through the 13.1 miles. I was ok with walking 😊. Fast forward to race weekend. The drive to Chattanooga was great, with a few stops at Buc-ee's. We stayed at a very cute Airbnb about 3 miles from the start.



On Day 1 we went down to the river for a shake-out swim. Shortly after the swim I received a text from Patty saying "the swim is canceled. This is no joke". Confused with this text, I called her. Race officials in fact did cancel the swim portion due to the fast-moving water and the safety of the swimmers and the kayak support. Bummed is an understatement, but I get it. Safety has to come first. It is now a duathlon.

We took off from our Airbnb for a short ride to make sure our bikes were in good condition on Day 2. Now it's time to go to the expo to get our race packet and get our bikes checked into transition. Bikes are in and now the jitters are there.

Day 3 RACE DAY: Up very early to eat breakfast and get down to the race site. Because the swim was canceled, the race will start with the bike. We lined up based on our number. I was #2675. Our start times were based off of our race numbers, so I took off about an hour after the race started. Super hilly, but an amazing course. I loved it! (3hrs 10min) Incredibly happy with that time for that course!! Now the run! Not only was the run a little hilly, but it was also now starting to get hot. I did what I could, with what training I did. I ran my first loop with Jonathon, which was a blessing. We did the run / walk thing for the first loop. He was now headed to the finish line, while I had another loop. He encouraged me to keep doing the run / walk intervals, which I did and finished strong. (3hrs 15min). My total time was 6:32.36. What an amazing weekend with Jonathan, Patty and Gail! Until next year, we'll just keep training! 70.3 Chattanooga – May 17, 2026!!



Dunedin Rotary Triathlon

On May 18 Karen Westerman was the top female finisher with a PR on her bike, in the Aquabike event (¼ mile swim, 12 mile bike) on Honeymoon Island. State Park. (photo: K. Westerman)



Tampa Bay BABES Triathlon

Congratulations to Macarena Martin Mayor and Chelsea Nauta on their finishes in the Tampa Bay BABES Triathlon at Ft. DeSoto Park on June 22, finishing 4th and 9th in their respective age groups! (photo: C. Nauta, BABES Triathlon)

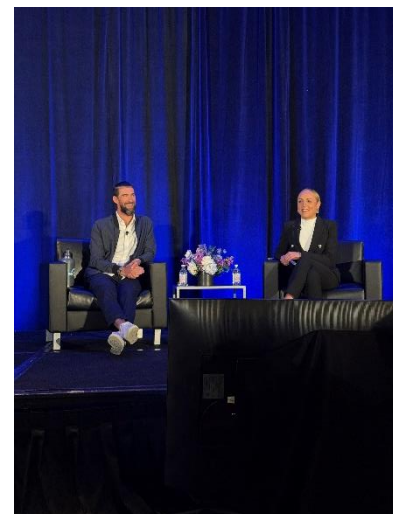
An Interview with Michael Phelps

by Chelsea Nauta

Recently, I had an incredible opportunity to combine my passion for high-performance and my lifelong love of swimming when I interviewed Michael Phelps at the annual Becker's Healthcare conference in Chicago. My company, LeanTaaS, is a strong partner of Becker's, and they asked me to step into this exciting role. What made this particularly special was my history with Michael; we trained together leading up to the 2012 Olympics, as I was a training partner for my UGA teammate, Allison Schmitt, who was part of Michael's small training group. Stepping onto that stage with him felt like catching up with an old friend, a testament to the countless hours we spent pushing each other in the pool and the shared experiences that forged our bond.

The interview itself was a masterclass in authenticity and connection. While I had pre-approved questions, Michael, trusting our past rapport, allowed me to go off-script. He even suggested I introduce him as an old friend I used to train with, setting the tone for a remarkably fluid and personal conversation. We delved into his Olympic journey, his relentless dedication to training, and his drive for excellence. He spoke candidly about the challenges of working with legendary coach Bob Bowman, and I even clarified to the audience that Michael never yelled at me during practice—to which he responded, "Well yea, because you worked hard. I didn't have a reason to yell at you." The entire exchange was punctuated by his endearing use of "Chels" and knowing glances, as he'd often turn to me and say, "you know how it is" or "you know what I'm talking about." Beyond the swimming, Michael vulnerably shared his struggles with suicide and depression, emphasizing his passion for mental health awareness. The audience was captivated, giving him a standing ovation for his openness and his commitment to leaving a legacy far beyond the pool.

This experience was a powerful reminder of how the discipline and pursuit of excellence in one area of life, like competitive swimming, directly translate to success in others, including the corporate world. My colleagues and executive team at LeanTaaS were incredibly impressed with my ability to perform under pressure and connect so genuinely with Michael. It was a true honor to represent my company in such a significant way, showcasing not just my professional capabilities but also the deep-seated values of dedication and high-level performance that swimming instilled in me.



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