

2022 Okaloosa County Swimming & Diving Hall of Fame

Coach Inductee

Betty Ballasch

Betty Ballasch was introduced to the world of swimming when her kids joined a team in the Philippines, where she helped with supplies, timing and the occasional practice. After moving back to the States, Ballasch's kids swam with the Fort Walton Swim Team after hearing about Bernie Lefebvre's reputation from the coach in the Philippines. When the team divided into the Playground Area YMCA team and the Hurlburt AFB team, Ballasch worked with Lefebvre as an aide. In the next decades, Ballasch received her Water Safety Instructor Certification and taught Red Cross swim lessons in Niceville, Rocky Bayou, and Eglin, as well as water aerobics and lessons at Solar Spa in Niceville for 21 years. Using her lesson experience, she began teaching lessons in her backyard pool, and estimates teaching a combined 5,000 adults and kids to swim.

Coach Ballasch, along with her husband and Len Strom, were integral in starting the swim team at Niceville High School. She started coaching the Bluewater Barracudas when they were a summer league team in 1989, and in a few years they developed into a year-round team under Ballasch's guidance. She starting coaching Lewis and Ruckel as a twin team, but then

coached Ruckel solely for 14 years, during which the girls team never lost a meet.



As a going away gift, the Bluewater Barracudas honored her by establishing a scholarship in her name, which Coast Aquatics still gives out today. Ballasch says of her coaching career: "My best awards were watching my teams receive awards, seeing people learn to swim, and seeing my swimmers reach their potential both in swimming and in life."