



Lapping it up

Adults enjoy friendship, fitness with **Columbus Sharks** swim team

By Kevin Joy | THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Their arms like turbines, members of the Columbus Sharks stroke, kick and turn with a fervor that belies the hour: 5:45 a.m. 🏊 The sky is still dark outside the fluorescent-lighted confines of the natatorium at St. Charles Preparatory School in Bexley, but the swimmers are undaunted, moving through a practice scrawled on a whiteboard. 🏊 With members grouped by ability in six lanes, their work is silent — almost hypnotic. 🏊 And, to them, it couldn't be more fun.



Building up confidence: coach Bo Martin, left, with team members

"There's something about swimming: You don't hear anything else," said Katie Wion, a 31-year-old mother from Upper Arlington who relishes the early-morning workout while her husband watches their baby. "All you hear is your own breathing."

The Sharks, an all-inclusive swim team for age 18 and older, are considered part of U.S.

Masters Swimming, an organization that provides workouts, clinics and competitions for adults who seek to improve their fitness and technique.

More than 500 Masters teams exist throughout the United States, with four in central Ohio.

The association, based in Florida, reached 50,000 members in September — an 11 percent jump from 2008 participation.

Membership isn't die-hard: Swim meets are scheduled, but members aren't obliged to compete.

The gatherings, after all, are

MORE ONLINE

 To view a slide show of a Columbus Sharks practice, visit Dispatch.com/multimedia.

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Cutting through the water: Amy Kaspar of the Columbus Sharks during a practice

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SHARKS

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more about intergenerational camaraderie — a social boost for people who enjoy the activity.

"Swimming is already a solitary sport, so I do better when there are other people around," said Peter Brown, 25, of Grandview Heights, who swam as a student for Grinnell College in Iowa.

"It's nice when you stick your head up to talk to somebody."

Her past attempts at self-guided swims at a gym failed, said Wion, the new mother.

"The motivation wasn't there," she said. "Now, I have teammates who say, 'Hey, I didn't see you on Friday' or 'Good job; you did really well today.'"

For Masters team enthusiasts, a nationwide network of clubs helps facilitate drop-in workouts when members travel, move or see relatives. (The Sharks have received a steady stream of calls from visitors seeking pool time with the group during the holidays.)

One-time swims cost \$5. Membership dues, depending on how often one wishes to practice (available as often as four times weekly), range from \$60 to \$140, paid every three months.

Regular attendance, though encouraged, isn't mandatory.

For those who seek it, the group also serves as a social outlet.

Kris Schramer called the Sharks when she arrived in town in 2000 for a job inter-



Jacquie Pisauro working out at St. Charles

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Want to jump in?

Here are some central Ohio options with Masters swim teams. (Note: Practice times are subject to change. For more information, check the Web sites.)

COLUMBUS SHARKS

(www.csmst.org)

► **Practices:** 5:45 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and 7 a.m. Saturdays in the St. Charles Preparatory School natatorium, 2010 E. Broad St.

► **Fees:** \$5 (one time) or \$60 to \$140 (quarterly)

GREATER COLUMBUS MASTERS TEAM

(www.gcsto.com)

► **Practices:** 5:30 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and 7 p.m. Sundays in the CCDE Aquatic Facility (formerly Westerville Athletic Club), 939 S. State St., Westerville

► **Fees:** \$5 (one time) or \$55 (monthly)

OHIO SPLASH

(www.ohiosplash.org)

► **Practices:** 8 p.m. Wednesdays and 7 p.m. Fridays in Aquatic Adventures, 3940 Lyman Dr., Hilliard; and 6 p.m. Sundays in the Columbus Aquatic Center, 1160 Hunter Ave.

► **Fees:** \$7 (one time), \$30 (monthly) or \$75 (quarterly)

view, going for a group swim before facing her potential employer.

"It took the edge off my nerves — swimming the hard workout, meeting people," said Schramer, 37. "It put me at ease."

She landed the position

— a professorship at the Columbus College of Art & Design — and has remained on the team since.

Although its 50 members include collegiate swimmers and triathletes, others are newbies or one-time swimmers who haven't hit

the pool in decades.

Sharks membership is open to those of all skill levels, although prospective members should at least be comfortable in the water, said Bo Martin, one of the team's two coaches.

Plenty of benefits exist

for all abilities, said Martin, who lost 60 pounds after ending a 23-year break from the pool in 2000.

"The best part is taking a swimmer who can't take a lap and can now do a mile," said the 49-year-old, who opted to coach in 2007 after a work-related injury.

"It's awesome to see someone go from a novice to where they're comfortable making it for the whole workout."

Some experienced swimmers, too, attend to improve performance.

Tammy Nickerson joined the group in October to help shave time off her swims in Ironman triathlons — challenges that combine a 26-mile run, a 112-mile bike ride and a 2.4-mile swim.

Practices that accommodate varying skill levels helped her achieve that goal.

"They give me direction, then leave me on my own to get it," said Nickerson, 48, of Granville. "There's not someone hovering over me."

Jacquie Pisauro discovered the Sharks 12 years ago — a part of the Greater Columbus Masters Team before the two factions split — after the club was highlighted in a newspaper.

The middle-school teacher from the Clintonville neighborhood credits the team for keeping her in shape.

She'd like to see other adults take the plunge.

"Older people need to know that this is a real opportunity for fitness," said Pisauro, 62.

"Nobody ever feels they're not good enough."
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