



Every day, adults of all ages suit up for coached workouts in swimming pools across America. United States Masters Swimming offers competition, exercise, and, maybe even romance.

black-and-red Lycra suits that feature the team's catfish logo — file out of the locker room.

"Let's go, let's go, let's go," Ackermann calls, clapping his hands. Dutifully, they adjust the straps on their goggles, stuff their hair under bathing caps, and jump into the pool. "Five-hundred easy warm-up. Let's *g-o-o-o-o-o*."

On cue, the trim, five-feet-seven-inch Pershan lowers himself into the water. With his smooth freestyle stroke, rhythmic breathing, and powerful flip turn, Pershan makes swimming twenty laps look easy. To watch him, you'd never guess that three years ago, Pershan could barely get from one end of the pool to the other, let alone swim two miles during the ninety-minute practice. "I did my own version of freestyle, and let me tell you, it was *ugly*," he says, laughing. "My stroke was short, my body was vertical, not horizontal, and I had no kick. After my first practice, a guy in his seventies took me aside and said, 'Don't worry, kid. You'll be fine.' I was so out of breath I could barely say, 'Thanks.'"

Today, Pershan is in his fourth season with the Evanston Wild Catfish, the largest masters team in Illinois (more than 100 swimmers strong) and state champions for the past fourteen years. He's learned all four strokes — freestyle, back, breast, and butterfly. He's competed in about ten meets, dropping his time in the 100-yard freestyle by nearly thirty seconds. And he has even traded roomy trunks for an itchy-bitsy, skin-tight Speedo. "At first, it's a little uncomfortable to be half-naked in front of strangers and finish last in

Water World

On a frigid November evening, Marc Pershan, a thirty-seven-year-old money manager and father of three, stands on the edge of the pool at Evanston Township High School in Evanston, Illinois, and stretches his muscular quadriceps. The humid air is thick with the aroma of chlorine; the Sixties hit "Stand By Me" blares from the radio in the corner, near the stack of kickboards; and two digital clocks blink the passing seconds and minutes in neon red. As David Ackermann, head coach of the Evanston Masters Swim Team, confers with four assistant coaches, fifty men and women — all in

By Cynthia Hanson

Water World

a race," admits Pershan, who trains three days a week with the team and one by himself. "But if you give masters swimming a chance, the benefits of getting in shape, setting goals, and making new friends far outweigh the initial embarrassment."

Every day, before dawn and after dark, adults of all ages are suiting up

for coached workouts in pools across America. They're Gen Xers, baby boomers, and senior citizens. They're doctors and dentists, lawyers and librarians, consultants and cops. They're beginners who want to learn a new sport, lap swimmers eager for more intense workouts, or triathletes determined to improve their weakest

event. Some folks who were on teams in high school and college want to return to competition. Then there are former Olympians, who simply can't get the water out of their systems.

Since 1981, membership in United States Masters Swimming (USMS) has nearly tripled, from 11,000 to 32,000, and today, there are 450 masters clubs nationwide. Teams train in all manner of facilities — tony health clubs, city pools, private swim clubs — and in all fifty states (though California leads with more than 10,000 masters swimmers).

Not bad for a group that started on a lark in 1972, the year Mark Spitz won seven gold medals in Munich and turned the national spotlight on swimming. Inspired by a "masters meet" that had just taken place in Amarillo, Texas, three New Englanders invited their old swimming pals to a competition in Wilton, Connecticut. "I hadn't competed in more than thirty years," recalls organizer Dorothy Donnelly, seventy-five, and a member of the 1940 Olympic team. (The Helsinki Games were canceled because of World War II.) "But I swam for fun, so I knew I could make two lengths of the pool."

Still, Donnelly never expected sixty swimmers — many of them middle-aged professionals who'd been among the country's best — to attend. "People kept saying, 'Why don't we do this more often?'" says Donnelly, retired executive secretary of USMS. "After our meet, teams sprouted up in Boston, New York, and other Northeast cities." Meanwhile, teams also were organizing in Florida and California, and in 1972, the Amateur Athletic Union hosted the first national masters championships. Nine years later, USMS formed its own corporation, becoming the official governing body for masters swimming.

DOUBLE D RANCHWEAR
YOAKUM, TEXAS

ACCENTE
Houston & San Antonio, TX
800-678-9402

HENRY JACKALOPE
Dallas, TX
214-692-8928

From the start, USMS welcomed swimmers of all levels. Anyone over age nineteen can join, for \$30 annual dues to USMS and the cost of pool time, which, depending on the facility, averages about \$450 per year. But coaches agree that beginners should be able to swim at least two lengths without collapsing. "It doesn't matter what your stroke looks like or how you breathe," says Judy Bonning, forty-four, coach of Coral Springs Masters Swimming in Coral Springs, Florida, and president of the Masters Coaches Association. "Beginners usually need a few private lessons to gain basic skills and build their confidence. Then, they're ready for gentle workouts."

"The only difference between the best swimmer and worst swimmer is technique," adds Gerry Rodrigues, thirty-three, head coach of UCLA Masters and co-publisher of *Swim*, the official

magazine of USMS. "Swimming is a finesse sport. If you perfect the technique, you'll swim faster."

On masters teams, though, swimmers go at their own pace. Swimmers are assigned to lanes based on their speed; the distance they swim and the intensity of the drills also vary according to ability. For neophytes, being "promoted" into a faster lane is a huge achievement. Just ask Bob Giering, a forty-four-year-old dentist and member of Elmhurst Masters in suburban Chicago. In 1993, Giering's inefficient, stiff-armed freestyle landed him in the lane next to the wall. Now, he's advanced to the "middle of the pool," where, three mornings a week, he swims the same grueling, three-mile workout as the elite swimmers (though eleven minutes slower). "The great thing about masters swimming is that they don't care how bad you are when

you start," says Giering, who joined to feel comfortable swimming with his sons and to improve his performance in triathlons. "Coaches can make the worst swimmer feel like the best swimmer because they're willing to help that individual reach his potential."

That means teaching swimmers how to do the four strokes and flip turns, dive off the blocks, and breathe without lifting their heads out of the water. Coaches sprint up and down the deck, correcting mistakes at the end of a set and offering encouragement. But swimmers also enjoy learning from experienced teammates. At UCLA Masters, swimmers have the luxury of training alongside Spitz, now forty-six, who doubles as their assistant coach. Evanston Masters doesn't have any sports legends, but two members are Olympians — sixty-year-old Dick Hanley, who won two

Our private
paradise is out of this
world, and within
your reach.

Bentwater, a gated waterfront community just north of Houston, offers world-class golf and boating, along with some of the most beautiful homes and homesites in America.

Yet, Bentwater is surprisingly affordable. Homesites start in the low \$20s and homes in the \$180s. So, if you find the idea of your own private paradise irresistible, don't wait until you can afford it. You already can.

Obtain the Property Report required by Federal law and read it before signing anything. No federal agency has judged the merits or value, if any, of this property.



BENTWATER

(Metro) 409/449-5700

Houston's pre-eminent golf and lake communitySM

**Come for the weekend.
Stay for a lifetime.**

Bentwater's "Explore Our Shores" Getaway Packages are also quite affordable! Enjoy one-to-three nights for two in a luxurious villa, a raft of activities such as golf, boating and tennis and a personal real estate opportunities tour. Call 1-800-313-7529 for information or reservations.

<http://www.bentwater.com>



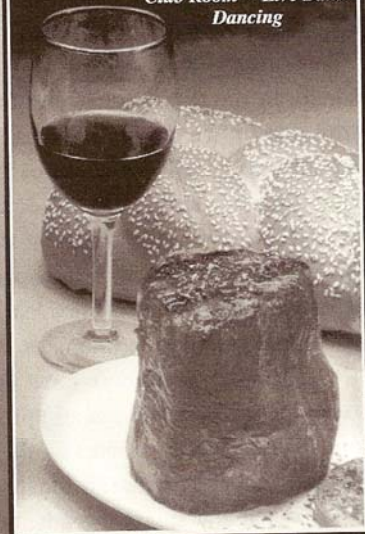
DALLAS'

Newest and Finest

Stone Trail

The New Legend in Prime Steaks
Achieved highest rating

Fish * Lamb * Veal * Poultry
Club Room * Live Band
Dancing



1 Prime Steaks in the country
Private rooms available

972-701-9600 www.stonetrail.com

Barry Switzer says,
When in Dallas,
Do as Texans do,
Fall in love with...

Yvette

Dallas' most elegant restaurant

~fresh fish daily~

~lobster tail~

~best prime-aged steak~

~finest wine selections~

Live music & dancing nightly

Private Dining/Banquet
facilities available up to 350

Open for Lunch and Dinner

14775 Midway Road

(972) 503-9777

(Two blocks South of Beltline)

Water World

medals for backstroke in Sydney and is the defending world masters champion in three backstroke events; and John Fitzgerald, forty-eight, winner of seven medals in the modern pentathlon. "If you're in a men's basketball league, you don't practice with Michael Jordan and Dennis Rodman," Pershan says. "But masters swimmers train with the most talented people in the sport. I'm improving, in part, because I'm watching other people."

Ask coaches to describe the appeal of masters swimming, and they immediately emphasize the relaxed atmosphere and social benefits. How swimmers attend as many (or as few) workouts as they choose. How they can sit out a set (or two) if they're winded. How they go out for breakfast after practice and throw holiday parties, summer picnics, and baby showers. How swimming can lead to romance. (Bonning met her husband at the World Masters Championship in Brisbane, Australia, in 1988, and three

married couples on Evanston Masters met through the team.)

In the interest of attracting fitness swimmers, coaches go to great lengths to downplay competition. "We're swimming to reduce stress in our lives, not add to it. Many swimmers have family and work commitments on the weekends, so they don't have time for meets," says Maureen "Mo" Chambers, thirty-eight, who coaches 375 masters swimmers on two San Francisco Bay-area teams, Mountain View and Western Athletic Club. "You can set other goals, like doing your personal best in practice or learning a new stroke."

But the numbers speak for themselves. In the Chicago area, there are thirteen meets per winter season — and one state meet that attracts 400 competitors from across Illinois. Meets are organized by age groups of five-year increments (nineteen to twenty-four, twenty-five to twenty-nine, thirty-five to thirty-nine, etc. to ninety-five and older); there are individual

a Meet in August

The country's premier adult swimmers

will make a big splash in Orlando August 14-17 when more than 1,200 men and women ages nineteen to 103 will compete for medals at the U.S. Masters Swimming National Long-Course Championships.

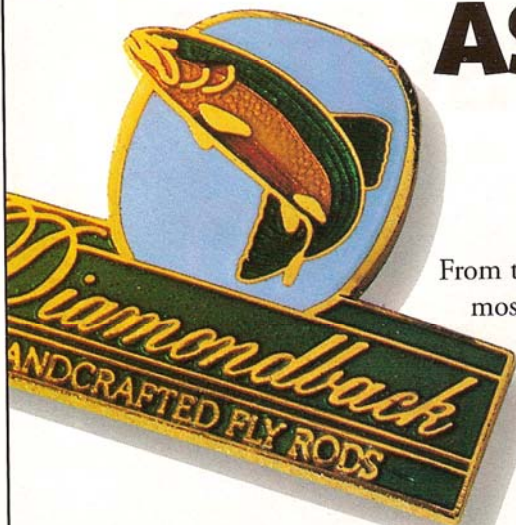
The four-day meet is open to all registered Masters swimmers. Participants compete in seventeen individual events by gender and age in freestyle, backstroke, butterfly, and breaststroke. There also are coed freestyle and medley relays.

The meet, which takes place each day from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the YMCA Aquatic Center, 8422 International Drive, is open to spectators.

For more information or a referral to a team in your area, call
U.S. Masters Swimming in Londonderry, New Hampshire;

(603) 537-0203.

LAPEL PINS FOR AS LOW AS \$1



From the most extravagant to the most affordable, PinSource is a world leader in the design and manufacture of fine custom lapel pins. Satisfaction is guaranteed.

PinSource® 800-678-9288

Call for our free color catalog, fax us for a free quote or visit our Web site.

Fax: (802) 865-3777 • Int'l: (802) 863-8600

1233 Shelburne Rd., Pierson House, So. Burlington, VT 05403 USA

E-Mail: info@pinsource.com • http://www.pinsource.com

SW797

Water World

events, plus freestyle and medley relays. For elite swimmers, there are two national masters championships — the short-course in May and long-course in August — which draw about 3,000 competitors.

"Twenty years ago, anybody could make the national top ten in their age group," recalls Bonning, who encourages swimmers to attend meets in South Florida but, like Chambers and Rodrigues, doesn't make it a condition for membership. "Now, [the caliber of swimmers] has increased. You almost have to be an ex-Olympian to do well at nationals."

To Ackermann, of Evanston Masters, competition is the cornerstone of his team's swimming. He requires his swimmers to compete in four local meets per year. He even distributes a fifty-page "new members manual" that covers everything from team rules (Speedos are *de rigueur*) to the importance of strength training (to improve endurance). "Look, this isn't open-lap swim at the Y or adult swim at the spa," says Ackermann, thirty-one. "If you don't want to compete, why join Evanston masters and pay the fee? Competing is part of our fun. It's a bonding experience. My strategy must be working because the team is growing."

Competition is exactly what prompted Cynthia Jones, a forty-six-year-old Chicago systems analyst, to become a founding member of Evanston Masters. In 1981, the aquatic director at her local YWCA urged Jones, a faithful lap swimmer, to join the fledgling team because she was "too fast" for the Y's fastest lane. "I'd competed as a kid, so she thought I'd enjoy structured workouts and the challenge of meets," explains Jones, who won the fifty-yard freestyle at the 1995 nationals. "But I train with more intensity now to achieve my goals."

"Old San Francisco Steak House"
... A Texas tradition for over 28 years!



OLD SAN FRANCISCO
SAN ANTONIO • AUSTIN • HOUSTON • DALLAS

TEXAS' TOP TEN STEAKHOUSES FOR 1997

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Bob's Steak & Chop House | Dallas, Texas |
| 2. The Palm Restaurant | Houston, Texas |
| Tie 2. Morton's of Chicago Steakhouse | Houston, Texas |
| 3. Kelly's Del Frisco | Houston, Texas |
| 4. Old San Francisco Steak House | San Antonio, Texas |
| 5. Pappas Bros. Steakhouse | Houston, Texas |
| 6. Chamberlain's | Dallas, Texas |
| 7. Lynn's Steakhouse | Houston, Texas |
| 8. Taste of Texas | Houston, Texas |
| 9. Grey Moss Inn | Grey Moss, Texas |
| 10. The Wyndham Warwick's Hunt Room | Houston, Texas |

The top rated steakhouse in San Antonio, the "Old San Francisco Steak House" is home to one of Texas' finest dining traditions. With additional restaurants in Austin, Dallas and Houston, you know your next visit to any Old San Francisco Steak House will be a "top rated" experience.



The Old San Francisco Steak House
Proudly serves the finest...
CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF™
Certified for success!

The Old San Francisco Steak House
SAN ANTONIO: 10223 Sahara • 210/342-2321
AUSTIN: 8709 N. IH-35 • 512/835-9200
HOUSTON: 8611 Westheimer • 713/783-5990
DALLAS: 10965 Composite Dr. • 214/357-0484

Not only is Jones driven to stay trim (she's a svelte 113 pounds), but she also is driven to win. "I push myself to do my personal best," admits Jones, currently training for the upcoming nationals in Federal Way, Washington. "The clock doesn't lie. You're either prepared, or you're not. And it's a tremendous sense of accomplishment to do well."

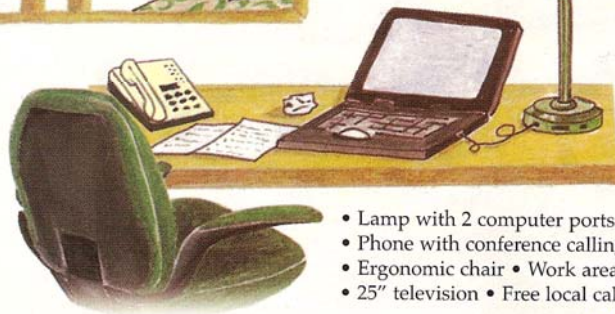
Sheila Stranc knows something about accomplishment. She joined Evanston Masters in 1995 for fitness and camaraderie, but in the end, she's come to value the competition. "I swam laps, but I wasn't getting a good workout alone," says Stranc, a forty-three-year-old nurse. "I reached the point where I needed the social aspect of a team to get me in the pool and a professional coach to give me a better workout." Under Ackermann's tutelage, Stranc made new friends, increased stamina, and more. "For my first meet, my goal was to finish the race without being disqualified," recalls Stranc, who swims freestyle and breast. "I thought I wouldn't make it, so I wouldn't even let my husband or daughters watch. But I did okay. Now, I feel really good about having competed. It's something I did by myself — and something I wish I'd started sooner."

And what of Marc Pershan? He's happily addicted to swimming. For the way it reduces stress, tones his muscles, and infuses him with energy. For the way it exhausts, but doesn't punish his body, as running and cycling do. And for the way it boosts his confidence — a confidence that spills into other facets of his life. "Considering where I started," Pershan says, "when I finish a workout, I *know* I've accomplished something."



Cynthia Hanson is a contributing editor at *Chicago* magazine. Her work also appears in *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Cosmopolitan*.

Relax in our new Business Friendly Rooms!



- Lamp with 2 computer ports
- Phone with conference calling
- Ergonomic chair • Work area
- 25" television • Free local calls

For Information & Reservations Call:
1-800-522-1555

Business Friendly Rooms are not available at all Vagabond Inn locations.



FREE SHIRT ~ FREE LOGO INCREDIBLE 10 YEAR GUARANTEE

6 Trial Shirts Just \$125!



In our never ending quest to make the world's best polo shirt, we have developed a two-ply 100% cotton cloth (everyone else uses a single ply shirt) that is exceptionally soft, yet wears like iron! This cloth makes our shirt the best available anywhere, at any price.

For \$125 we will send you 5 trial shirts with your logo, plus one free! No set-up charges, no embroidery charges, and no

shipping and handling on your trial order. Available in white, navy, black, burgundy, forest green, and natural - sizes small through XXL. Your complete satisfaction unconditionally guaranteed for 10 long years! Send in your order today, or call for more information. WE MAKE GREAT SHIRTS!

800-847-4478 • FAX 910-251-7771

THE QUEENSBORO SHIRT COMPANY

Dept SW77 • P.O. Box 2598 • Wilmington, NC 28402