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## **Masters swim program fills many roles for Mesa adults**

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The Republic

The word “Masters” only perpetuates a false connotation.

As Mr. Smith walks barefoot around the pool, sunglasses on and stopwatch in hand, he yells out “Rest for five seconds!” Off to the side, Mrs. Smith is instructing another swimmer to eradicate unnecessary (and costly) movements from her stroke.

Then you realize this is a different kind of swim practice. The pace is just as fast, but the bodies in the water usually aren’t.

Mr. Smith chides one, “Come on, just ‘cause your wife can beat you in the 50 free...” And that swimmer Mrs. Smith is working with, she’s a middle-aged woman simply testing the waters.

“Masters is not for masters,” explained Paul Smith, who along with wife Laura heads the Mesa Aquatics Club’s new adult program. “It’s for people who are adults, 18 or older, who want to be involved in swimming at any level: fitness, competition, social.”

The last of those purposes, why many of these 30 and 40-somethings are here at Mesa’s newly renovated Kino Aquatic Center, is especially important to Paul.

“It’s like neighbors that drive (toward) their house, pull into their garage and close it,” he said. “It’s like going to the gym – they go to their same machines, sit there, not talking to anybody and put their headphones on. (Here), we kind of force a little socialization ... We make people switch lanes, meet new people, workout together.”

The Smiths both swam collegiately at UCSB, met at an alumni event there and married 18 months later. They spent 22 years together in Colorado, staying in tune with the swimming community and tending to their day-jobs as manufacturer’s representatives in footwear and apparel.

Before former Arizona State swim coach and MAC founder Ron Johnson died in August, he pushed Paul to consider building a Masters program.

“A facility like this doesn’t show itself very often. We were so excited to do this on a more structured basis,” Paul said. “It’s very rare to find an opportunity that you could grow something into a full-time in business in aquatics.”

Sponsored, at least in part, by Mesa Public Schools, MAC caters to youth swimmers seeking club-like opportunities in swimming. The new Masters division – it debuted with five paying members on Sept. 1 and now has about 70 – helps to fund that lower age-group.

Three-time Olympic Gold Medalist Rowdy Gaines is visiting for a clinic Nov. 14 and U.S. Masters Swimming will hold its national meet at MAC in 2011.

But the Masters segment of MAC has a different purpose and an entirely different clientele poolside: father-daughter pairings, ex-college swimmers, professional triathletes, former Olympians and even moms.

“A lot of it is family and friends,” Laura said. “So often (in this community), a new person will be scared to death, they walk on deck and they look and know seven people who are already here. So, suddenly it’s not scary anymore.”

Amy Mullaney, a coach at Phoenix Valley Christian, has been swimming competitively for 16-plus years but still enjoys working alongside the likes of Kim Owens.

“Nobody cares what your size, shape and ability are,” Mullaney, 49, said.

Owens, a 41-year-old Mesa mother of six, learned of the Smiths’ startup from neighbors. She said the workout acts as a physical therapy for her as she eases her way back into the water.

“It’s an invitation to accomplish whatever you want to,” she said.