

What Makes Arnold, Bonnie, Diane and Ernie Swim?

By Gerry DeBenedetti

At OCC we have some stalwarts that sort of stand out as amazing swimmers, either because they competitively race ALL THE TIME, or seem to have swum forever, or even hold National titles.

And they are of "certain age" when a lot of swimmers are former swimmers, and most certainly would not drive to the North Shore in the dawn's early light to get in the cold ocean, even if they were not the only one in their age group.

With the Roughwater Swim (September) behind us, and the OCC Castle Swim (November) facing us, this is a good time to have a look at four of those who mostly do not paddle, or run, or "do Molokai", although some of them have done those things, and indeed, may still. What they have consistently done, and still do, is swim.

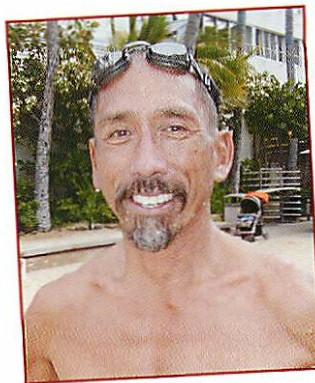
Arnold Lum, Bonnie Eyre, Diane Stowell and Ernie Leskovitz have a combined age of 266, which would make them a formidable relay age group if they were all on one team. Ranging in age 57 to 72, they are all familiar sights at the OCC beach. Well, maybe if you get up early enough, because some of them are not swimming for fun at 7 a.m., they are seriously training for something.

There appears to be some Zen like quality that makes them "one with the Ocean". No joking, they sort of enter some other space, whether it is mental or physical, where the water is a friend, not an adversary. They are not gasping for air, they are not struggling, they are sort of embracing it and zooming along. For Bonnie and Ernie, the temperature is not even an issue.

While Bonnie and Ernie are almost exclusively swimmers, Diane and Arnold are competitive in other sports, and all four of them get their names in the papers for regular age group placing, year after year after year. They are like energizer bunnies, going and going, and their batteries don't seem to be getting wet. What makes them keep swimming?

Arnold Lum is a frequent competitor. He does not mind where he places; he just enters and participates in as many events as he can. At age 57, he is not a swimming legend at OCC, and he will say that if he could do only one sport, it would have to be surfing. Sort of an all purpose guy, he likes to run and bike and lift weights.

A Local Boy, he learned to swim where a lot of kids did,



Arnold Lum



Bonnie Eyre

the Richards Street YWCA. He continued swimming and surfing in Santa Barbara in college, and lived on the mainland from 1973-86. He took up swimming on the mainland because he could not surf in bulky wet suits, and the pools were heated. He feels swimming is the most useful way to stay in shape without stressing your joints.

When he came back to Hawaii, he continued all of his sports, but gave up the pool for the ocean.

A former OCC Swim Committee chair for five years, he is now Co-Chair with Dennis Blake, and they have formed a spectacular committee in 2003-04, putting on a Spring invitational swim that draws nearly 100 (and this is by invitation only), and of course, continuing the 30 year tradition of the OCC Castle Swim, which Arnold has entered nine times, and won three times in age group. In his defense, he is still a young guy, in a popular age group and faces more competition.

Did we mention fly fishing? He is passionate about that, don't get him started.

Of the four swimmers, only Bonnie Eyre logs her mileage on the swim charts in the locker rooms. These charts are continuous. They start when you say they do, and keep accumulating for as long as you log; very scientific.

In 1985 Bonnie received the OCC Transpac Award, for accumulating the 2,225 miles representing the distance from Los Angeles to Hawaii, the distance of the biennial Transpac Yacht Race. Only nine OCC swimmers have received this award. She now has logged nearly 8,000 miles, on her way to the Whitbread around the world, no doubt.

At age 72, Bonnie thinks she was probably swimming before she was walking. She was on the Punahou Senior Varsity, class of 51. She continued to swim in college in New York, came back to Hawaii, and just kept right on swimming.

In 1975 she began competing in the UH Masters, and went to the Nationals in 1980, eventually giving up pools for her beloved ocean (no chlorine). The ocean is more fun, says she, and she trains regularly for ocean swims, which she enters selectively, unlike some of our other swimmers who race race race.

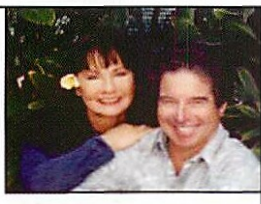
Bonnie's regular path is out to the windsock, with some meandering around to visit her "friends." Since she always wears a mask, she regularly sees turtles, both medium sized and babies. There is an Eagle Ray she visits with, and a squid, and she will definitely tell you she is "one with the ocean." She swims for about 45 minutes at OCC in the a.m., then in her home pool in the p.m., and admits to liking cold water, the 58 degrees at Lake Tahoe does not hold her back.

She says if you can imagine a sea bird soaring ABOVE the ocean, she is soaring IN the ocean, and feels like she is out of her body, watching herself swim.

Since she feels so attuned with the water, and enters races



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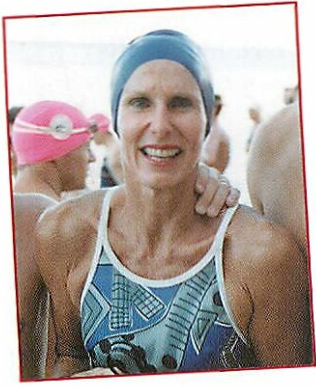
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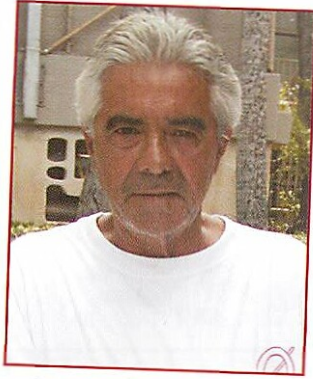
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Diane Stowell



Ernie Leskovitz

selectively, she avoided the Roughwater from Hell in 2003. She went to Sans Souci that morning, but saw seaweed on the beach, and that told her to stay out today. She estimates she has completed about 11 Roughwater Swims, and was entered this year, results not known as we go to print.

Bonnie likes the Turkey Swim, some events at Waimea and Haleiwa, and since she frequently goes to Tahiti, she has some favorites there too. Bora Bora lagoon before breakfast; how does that sound? While there, she goes about two miles by her hotel, swimming and snorkeling.

Bonnie has entered the Castle Swim 16 times, and won in age group 12 times.

Diane Stowell has won her age group in all of the 14 Castle Swims she has entered, many Roughwater swims, and for 2004, was "not sure yet" about these distance swims when we interviewed her.

This last regatta season she had to give up paddling because of rotator cuff surgery, and for a True Energizer Bunny, this surgery on an essential shoulder has taught her how painful patience is.

She exercises twice a day, mostly running now to replace the swimming she has had to modify because of the shoulder surgery. Part of her rehabilitation involves workouts in the Fitness Center, where she frequently encounters Arnold and Ernie.

She also likes hiking (which does not hurt her shoulder), and loves to surf (at Tonggs, mostly), but she swims six days a week, and does nothing else so frequently. Now sufficiently recovered to participate in an international meet held at UH in June, she broke a breast stroke world record (by three seconds) for women aged 70. Her time in the 200 Meter race was 3:46.

She has held many local swim records at the masters swim group at UH, local meets, both pool and open ocean, and lots of biathlons where she can both run and swim.

Amazingly enough, Diane rarely swims at OCC because "there is not enough time in the day" to fight the traffic to the Club.

Also born in Hawaii and educated in Honolulu at Punahou, she spent 12 years commuting between her psychologist job in California and Hawaii where she taught psychology at Punahou. She has now retired from both jobs and as most retirees will tell you, THEN she became really busy!

As a young person she swam competitively in high school, but when she went to Mills College and UCLA, there were no women's swimming programs (what a difference Title IX makes, for those of you who have never understood what this federal requirement has meant to women). She points out that girls today don't realize the opportunities they have, that were not available to their grandmothers.

Diane has two adult children, one grandson, and a brother

on Maui, all of whom are OCC members.

She feels swimmers have a bond, some kind of connection that has nothing to do with competition, as if swimming out in the open ocean means you have to watch and care for one another.

In November she is going to Australia for the Pan Pacific Games, held biennially in different countries.

A newcomer to OCC, Ernie Leskovitz has won the Castle Swim in his age group in all of the six times he has entered.

Recently featured in a newspaper interview by Katherine Nichols, she describes swimming with Ernie as a "humbling" experience, joining him at 7:30 a.m. for a 2,000 meter OCC ocean swim. He eventually left her behind, and later she discovered it was his second workout, since he had already put in 4,000 meters with the UH masters.

At age 67, he says he has been a competitive swimmer for 55 years. Since joining OCC, he has been enjoying the opportunities to paddleboard, and we would not be surprised to see the oldest Novice B OHCR paddler at age 70, some guy named Ernie.


He swims the North Shore Swim series, and despite his ability to always win in age group, he usually places in the top 15 overall, and in the Waikiki Roughwater, in the top 100, although he will admit the 2003 Roughwater from Hell was a little different, he described it as fun. That was probably because he walked ON the water to the finish line, thereby avoiding the IN water current.

His training puts all of our other swimmers in the shade: five days a week at UH masters, OCC for another 2,000 meters, and on weekends, a Double Roughwater at OCC. "All pleasure," says Ernie.

Coming from a Marine family, Ernie was here at Pearl Harbor, and remembers hiding in the sugar cane fields during the airplane attacks. Evacuated to California, he grew up there, and after he joined the Marines, he became a competitive swimmer.

After living in London, Canada, and Florida, he returned to Hawaii, and joined the Outrigger. We have become his new family, his new base, and he appears to have found his place.

What makes Arnold, Bonnie, Diane and Ernie swim? Ernie tells us: "it's the journey, the training, the anxieties, what you do, how you evolve-and singing in the shower."



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