

Note from Team President Cathy Gainor “Getting Inspired”

How often have we said that we want to be like (fill in the blank) when we grow up? Especially when watching older swimmers compete.

Well, I recently had that thought yet again.

I attended the Maryland Senior Olympics awards ceremony, where Ancient Mariner Neal Gillen was inducted into the Hall of Fame. Neal invited Tom Denes and me, as well as his other coaches, to join him at his table.

Learning about Neal’s accomplishments (more on him soon) and those of the other three Hall of Fame honorees was inspiring. Equally inspiring were those older seniors who set records in this year’s state Senior Games — for example, the 90-94-year-old man who set the Maryland record in the 50-yard dash in under 10 seconds (9.73), the 80-84-year old woman who did the cycling 5k time trial in 13:15 minutes and the 70-74 year old man who rolled 763 in 10-pin bowling.

Those achievements make me think of my fellow, older Ancient Mariners who swim with us regularly and are a constant source of inspiration.

Not only does Neal swim practically every single swim meet in the Washington area, but he also is chairman of the Maryland Senior Olympics Commission. Before his swimming career, he was a basketball player, playing at NYU — and competed in horse jumping! He won five gold medals in this year’s Senior Games and has a total of 70 medals, including some from basketball.

If you look at the Ancient Mariner team records, you’ll see that Neal also has about two dozen team records in free and back in the 80-84 and 85-89 age groups.

Neal, who turns 88 this year, didn’t start swimming until the 1990s. He started out as an open water swimmer, but decided to move into the pool. He joined the Ancient Mariners in 2010 at the tender age of 73 and swam his first Albatross Open in 2011. He also has done the Alcatraz swim five times.

Then there’s our oldest swimmer, Bob Benson, who swims at MLK. Bob has swum the Great Chesapeake Bay Swim more than 10 times, including this year at age 90. Unfortunately, Bob didn’t make the time cutoff at the 3-mile mark this year, but how many 90 year olds can say they swam 3 miles across the choppy Chesapeake Bay? Probably just one.

Bob also has four team records in the 85-89 year old age group in the longer free events (200 yards+). And in this year’s national One-Hour Virtual Championship in January, he swam an amazing 2,575 yards, outpacing the second place 90-94 year old swimmer by more than 1,400 yards.

Our oldest female swimmer is Dottie Buchhagen at a “mere” 83. Dottie also owns a bunch of team records — 14 freestyle records in all, in every age group from 65-59 up to 80-84. She also competes in the one-mile Bay Swim just about every year and has traveled to many open water swims, from New Jersey to St. Pete Beach in Florida to the Turks & Caicos. She is a fixture at Sunday morning practices, and also takes spinning classes, does tons of stretching and lifts weights regularly to keep herself in top shape. She also is always game to try new things.

These three Ancient Mariners are indeed inspiring. But at the end of the day, it’s not about the records. It’s about being able to still swim at an advanced age and building long-term relationships with friends and teammates. Neal, Bob and Dottie are a great reminder of the USMS motto and what we all strive for: Swimming for life.

Upcoming Events

12th Annual Solstice Swim Meet

Saturday, November 22 - Germantown, MD
Register Now, Spots are filling up - Registration closes Monday, November 17

4th Annual Sweater Weather Meet

Saturday, December 6 - Springfield, VA
Registration closes Thursday, December 4

32nd Annual Carol Chidester Memorial Swim Meet Series

Meet #3: Saturday, December 13 - Glen Burnie, MD
Meet #4: Sunday, January 18, 2026 - Annapolis, MD
Meet #5: Saturday, February 21, 2026 - Severna Park, MD
Meet #6: Sunday, March 15, 2026 - Annapolis, MD

2026 USMS Spring Nationals

Thursday, April 30 - Sunday, May 3 2026 - Greensboro, NC

2026 Great Chesapeake Bay Swim (4.4 Mile and 1 Mile)

Sunday, June 14, 2026 (6:30 am start for 4.4-mile swim and 7:30 am start for 1-mile swim)
For more information, visit bayswim.com.

US Masters Swimming Virtual and Fitness Events

Check the USMS website for upcoming virtual and fitness events



Practice Schedule

Fall 2025 - Winter 2026

Germantown Indoor Swim Center (GISC)

Sunday: 10 am to 12 pm

Martin Luther King Swim Center (MLK)

Monday and Wednesday: 8:30 to 10 pm

Olney Swim Center (OSC)

Tuesday and Thursday: 8:30 to 10 pm

Saturday: 7:30 to 9 am

Silver Spring Recreation and Aquatic Center (SSRAC)

Tuesday and Thursday: 6:30 to 8 am



Visit ActiveMONTGOMERY.org to register for masters swimming each session and other Montgomery County programs.



U.S. MASTERS SWIMMING

In addition to registering for Montgomery Ancient Mariners, all team members must register with United States Masters Swimming (USMS) for insurance and liability purposes.

[Renew Now for 2026!](#)

Back in the Swim of Things

by Karen Finucan Clarkson

Getting back in the pool after a year's absence due to hip pain and then replacement surgery was sheer joy. But the prospect of returning to open water swimming was somewhat unsettling.

Scouring [Ray's Notebook](#) for possibilities, I decided to link my open water return with visits to two of my sons – one living in Jacksonville, Florida; the other in Charlotte, North Carolina. That would, I figured (correctly), take some of the pressure off by allowing for family time and sightseeing.

The [Hammerhead Ocean Marathon](#) at Jacksonville Beach (not far from St. Augustine – a cultural and historical delight) in August offered three distances: 1K, 2K and 5K. I felt confident I could do the 2K without embarrassing myself. So, I registered. October's [Swim Across America-Charlotte swim](#) – with distances of 0.5, 1 and 2 miles – required more thought. With some trepidation, I signed up for the 2-mile swim.

My goal was to complete not compete – and I achieved it with both swims, though to varying degrees given my expectations.

The swims, so entirely different, had two things in common – one by sheer luck (the glorious weather) and the other planned (a course welcoming to newbies/returnees). These two open water swims are great for rookies and those wanting to get their feet wet after a break.

Hammerhead Ocean Marathon



The attraction was that it was point to point. Only two turns (out at the start to head north and in at the end to head west) but otherwise a straight swim. The 2K race began at a point south of the historic Jacksonville Beach Ocean Rescue Headquarters, where the swim ended. Of the 300 swimmers, more than half opted for the 2K.

While on the beach, awaiting the race's start, I sought out women who appeared to be in my age group (65-69) to inquire if they had done the swim before and could offer me advice. Their take was, unless I was in it to win it, I should start at the back of the pack, which was a great suggestion.

The swim took me just over 40 minutes (see my kudos to the Ancient Mariners coaches below), though my official time, which included a 28-second walk up the beach, was closer to 41 minutes. Still, it earned me first in my age group. I will say I was humbled by the 72-year-old woman who finished the swim six minutes ahead of me. Of the 155 swimmers ages 12-77, she was 35th and I was 85th. Clearly, there's lots of room for me to improve.

Swim Across America-Charlotte



This swim in Lake Wylie, South Carolina, was not a race but a fundraiser for cancer research, something I feel strongly about, having lost a first cousin (when she was mid-50s) and my mother and mother-in-law (both in their 80s) to different variants of the disease. Swimmers must raise or donate \$350 in addition to their \$50 registration fee. Two posts on Facebook helped me exceed the fundraising requirement.

I was attracted to this swim by its emphasis on safety and a well laid-out course. There were several dozen kayakers and paddleboarders along the half-mile course. And, the organizers offered "angel swimmers" – folks experienced with the course – to accompany anyone regardless of the distance they chose. I opted out of the offer, though in the end I had an angel swimmer accompany me along the last eighth of a

mile to the finish line.

My expectation was I could complete the 2 miles (four times around the course) in under 1 hour and 30 minutes, and hoped to finish in under 1:25. Two equipment failures – I lost my cap twice and my goggles flooded – resulted in a time of 1:32, a bit of a disappointment. Somebody had to be last in and it was me.

After returning to my Vrbo rental, just five minutes from the YMCA's Lake Thunderbird, the site of the swim, I realized that my disappointment was, to a degree, unfounded. Being somewhat of a Luddite, I didn't know that my swim watch captured both elapsed time (which included the equipment failures) and swim time, which was 1:23.

Hats Off to Ancient Mariners Coaches

In preparing for the August 2K swim, I worked frequently on my own at the long-course pool in Bethesda. I was in a rut. No matter what I tried, I could not get below 44 minutes.

One Saturday morning in July at an Olney swim practice, Coach Sandy talked about body alignment/rotation and stroke length, which I took to heart. Turns out you can teach an old dog new tricks. Over five weeks, I dropped my 2K time by nearly 4 minutes. The August stroke clinic - where Tom and Cathy provided a few other tips - cemented things for me both physically and psychologically and allowed me to swim confidently the following week in Jacksonville.

Moving Forward

I plan to further challenge myself with open water swims in 2026. If any fellow Ancient Mariner swimmers have plans, please let me know (kfclarkson@gmail.com) as I might be interested in joining you.



Outdoor progress on renovations at KSAC (Photo Credit: Dottie Buchhagen)

For more information on the renovations and photos, visit the [Montgomery County Recreation website](#).

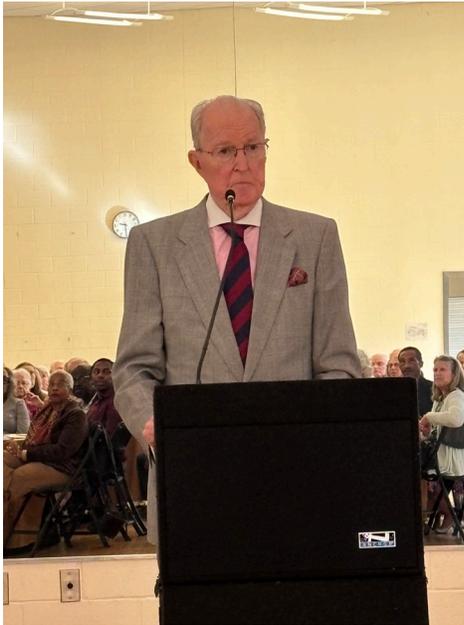
Hall of Fame Induction and Successful Season of Swimming

by Neal Gillen

On Sunday, October 26, I was inducted into the Maryland Senior Olympics Hall of Fame in a ceremony that coaches Cathy Gainor and Tom Denes attended.

Originally an open-water swimmer, I joined Montgomery Ancient Mariners in 2010, and my initial pool competition was the Albatross Open in 2011. Since then, I have participated in a minimum of eight DMV area and national meets each year,

I have been ranked in the USMS Top 10 since 2015 in short course yards and meters and long course meters in the 50, 100, 200 and 500 freestyle and the 50, 100, and 200 backstroke in my age group. I currently compete in the 85-89 age group.



Most recently, it was September gold at the Maryland Senior Olympics at Germantown Indoor Swim Center. I won gold in the 50, 100 and 200-yard freestyle and 50 and 100-yard backstroke events in the men's 85-89 age group. Two weeks later at the D.C. Senior Games, I won the gold again in the 50, 100 and 200-freestyle and backstroke events.



In Memorium

Alvin Russell



Alvin Russell was a fixture of the Ancient Mariners in the late 1990s and early 2000s, until he moved to Charleston, W.Va., to help his ailing father. Coaches encouraged him to do 100 fly in a meet so he could set the team record — and he did — but he injured his shoulder in the process. Alvin was part of the Ancient Mariners “breakfast club” following Sunday practice. He was known for his super-long showers (the best shave of the week was after Sunday practice, he would say), his investment advice, and love of movies, blues and jazz, and sports, especially the Steelers and Redskins/Commanders.

Alvin had MS for decades, but rarely complained about it and instead was always happy and optimistic, determined not to let it rule his life. He was in and out of hospitals with various ailments, and yet, as soon as he got out, he was back in the pool, swimming at least a mile with his friends at the Charleston YMCA.

Ken Pettijohn



We knew Ken Pettijohn as Margot’s husband. But he was much more than that. He was part of the team. He officiated in many of our Albatross Opens, helped set up at team socials and picnics, and could always be depended on to serve as master griller. When not helping out, he was always up for a good conversation over a beer or two.

After Margot died, Ken came to several of our team parties and maintained friendships with some team members. Several of us visited him in April, and he seemed to be doing pretty well. Unfortunately, his lung cancer returned and he passed away in September following a bout with pneumonia.

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customized team gear!**

Each purchase supports the team!

Back for a 50th Anniversary Swim

by Ken Hinga

In the fall of 1972, I was a graduate student at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography (GSO). The GSO campus sits bayfront on the west passage of lower Narragansett Bay with a small beach. Directly across from GSO is the small, uninhabited Dutch Island with a historic lighthouse at its southern point.

My newly chosen major professor was known for being a bit impulsive. He had recently learned to swim and decided he wanted to swim to the lighthouse on Dutch Island, just about a mile distance, so we assembled a small group of folks who thought such a swim would be fun, plus a few lifeguard kayakers and small boats. A date and time at slack tide was picked in late August and we set off. Everyone made it, even (eventually) my major professor. The boats gave us a ride back.

This started a tradition that has continued every fall. I swam it for the first few years while still in graduate school. Jobs in other cities took me away and I gave up regular swimming for a few decades.

Since moving to the DC area in 2003, I have participated in masters swimming with the Ancient Mariners. I credit swimming for my relative good health and fitness (arthritis aside) and I also lost some weight. While KSAC is closed, I have been swimming on my own at the Silver Spring pool. I swim late mornings, 1,200 meters, three times a week. I limit the distance to not aggravate a shoulder that has had two surgeries.

When the announcement came from GSO in the fall of 2022 for the 50th anniversary Dutch Island swim, I couldn't resist and booked a flight to Rhode Island. I was something of a celebrity, being the only swimmer in both the first and 50th Dutch Island swims. I was also the oldest at 74 years of age. Thanks to swimming with Ancient Mariners, the mile swim was pretty routine, though there is more chop in open water than in the pool. I swallowed a bit of bay water, and lane markers on the bottom of the bay would have been helpful. One of the guard kayaks had to keep shoing me back on course. The cobble beach at the take-out was murder on the feet. Next time I'll wear water shoes.

My daughter now lives in Rhode Island, so I welcome a good excuse to go up and visit. This year, I couldn't make the Dutch Island swim, but was told of a new swim two weeks later that also leaves from the GSO beach. This one goes up the bay a little over a mile to the Saunderstown yacht club. I flew up for a visit and did the swim and I still need those lane markers.

You can view the route of the swim to the Dutch Island lighthouse on a GSO web cam: <https://web.uri.edu/gso/webcams/> .



Dutch Island Lighthouse (Photo Credit: Wikipedia)

Rip Current Dual Boards: From Cross County Travels to TV

by Jose-Luis Gallagher

I have had a whirlwind year bringing my mission - and invention – to swimmers, coaches, and aquatics professionals across the country.

Since spring, I have been on the road for [Rip Current Sports](#), sharing the story and science behind my patented Dual Boards across California, Colorado, Seattle, and Georgia. Each stop has been a chance to connect, inspire, and demonstrate how innovative training tools can reshape the way people learn to swim.

In California, I kicked things off with a demo for Paralympic Coach Wilma Wong, and her swimmers, followed by sessions in Colorado Springs with Colorado College Head Swim Coach Jen Buffin. Then came a visit to Amazon Accelerate Seattle, and a keynote and demo at the All Things Aquatics event in St. Simons Island, Georgia, where aquatics directors, elite coaches, and industry leaders experienced Dual Boards in action.



Back home now, I have no signs of slowing down. My newest venture? A collaboration with Daymond John (of “Shark Tank”) and entrepreneur Rudy Mawer for the upcoming “Inside Success” TV series. This six-month project will highlight innovators who are changing the world. My episode will shine a light on drowning prevention, a cause close to my heart. With more than 300,000 drowning deaths globally each year, my mission to make swimming safer and more accessible has never been more urgent.

Through it all, I still make time to swim, connect and give back. I’ve been offering free Dual Boards demos throughout the DMV and will always make time, despite my travel and filming schedule ahead.



Photo Credit: Lynda Honberg

Team member Lynda Honberg and MLK coach Leon Wells are both members of the Oxon Hill Bike Club and frequently see each other on club rides, including the club’s Rural Legacy ride in June in Brandywine, MD.

Several Ancient Mariners and their families came out to the Washington Capitals Swim Night game against the Minnesota Wild. Besides seeing the Capitals win, all Mariners received a Capitals swim cap.

Thank you to Marci Goldberg for organizing this fun social outing!

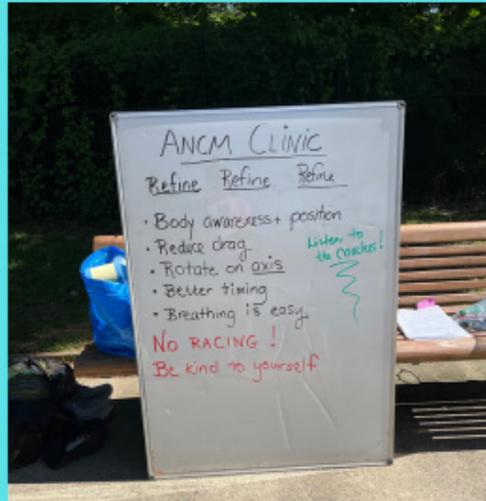
2025 MONTGOMERY ANCIENT MARINERS TEAM PICNIC



Thank you to everyone who attended the team picnic in September! Also a big thank you to Kara Permisohn for hosting this year!

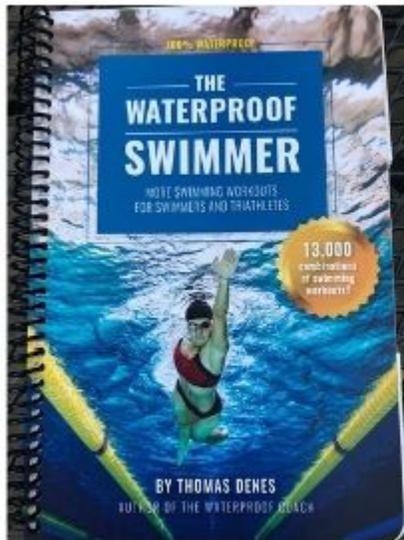
[Check out pictures from this year's picnic here!](#)

2025 MONTGOMERY ANCIENT MARINERS SWIM CLINIC



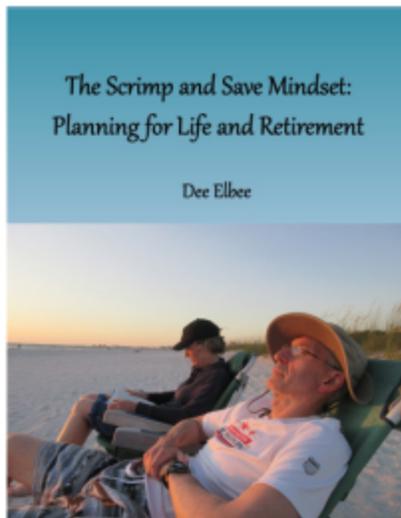
Thank you to all coaches and swimmers who attended our Swim Clinic in August! We look forward to hosting more clinics in the future!

[Check out pictures from this year's clinic here!](#)



Can't attend an Ancient Mariners practice during the week? Looking for workouts when swimming on your own? Coach Tom Denes has written *The Waterproof Swimmer*, which includes over 40 pages of workouts that that you can mix and match.

To order a book, talk to Tom at practice or email him at waterproofcoach@gmail.com.



Team member Dottie Buchhagen (pen name Dee Elbee) has a fun new book out on saving money. Who doesn't want to do that?

The book is full of clever and quirky hacks about how you can keep more money in your pocket. As an added bonus, coaches Cathy and Tom are on the cover! You can buy the book, *The Scrimp and Save Mindset: Planning for Life and Retirement*, on Amazon.