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Seven-time winner  
Michellie Jones returns  
to Chicago to help celebrate  
the race's silver anniversary



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## OFFICIAL PROGRAM

August 26, 2007

# Swimming Like the Fishes

## A frustrated swimmer's guide to getting in and staying in the water

By Rebecca Jensen

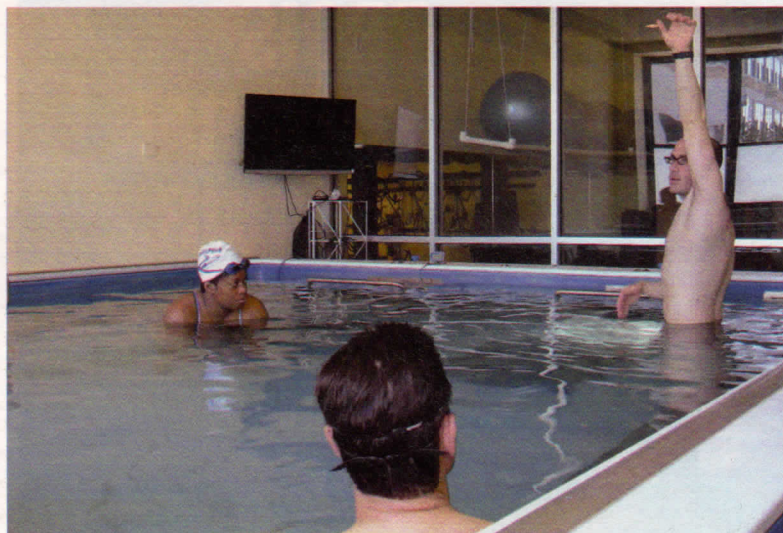
Every kid learns to swim, or it seems that way when hundreds of kids in park district, YMCA and age-group swimming clinics and workshops flood local pools in their funky colored goggles and Dolfin "uglies" suits every summer. Adults, though, don't have the same abundance of choices if they don't know how to swim or want to swim better. Some join Masters teams and participate in stroke clinics, but these are intimidating places for novice swimmers. What if you're going through a midlife crisis and just signed up for a triathlon or are just tired of getting lapped by the 70-year-old in the next lane? For those swimmers with a problem, there's help: Total Immersion (TI). Coaches like John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Blue Dolphins, highlighted in *Chicago Magazine's* "Best of Chicago 2006," or Devonna Eubanks of Calm Waters are among an elite few teaching adults in the Chicago area how to swim like a fish.

The teaching philosophy of Total Immersion is simple: fish swim with grace and speed but have no arms and legs; people can also achieve grace and speed without bulking up their arms and legs. The focus, according to Devonna Eubanks, certified Total Immersion instructor ([www.calmwaters.info](http://www.calmwaters.info)), is on the core: "unlike other groups

that emphasize arm and leg strength, we're engaging muscles in the core. The idea is that you don't have to work as hard."

Years ago, I racked up a lot of yardage on a high school swim team, but when I returned to the pool after a 10-year hiatus, I realized that it's not just like riding a bike. It took me many hours and lots of struggle to become willing to do something different. At 30, I realized I wasn't getting any younger, so I signed up for the Subaru women's triathlon in Naperville. This scared me enough to join a local Masters team, but after each practice, I felt like I was just getting worse. When I came to my first Total Immersion weekend clinic, I was ready to try anything. I was tired of getting lapped and frustrated by watching other swimmers muscle their way through the water. I believed that I would never be as fast because I wasn't as tall or as strong.

Leah Nyikes, Director of Liquid Lifestyles and Total Immersion Senior Coach, affirmed that many swimmers come to TI with similar complaints. "Often swimmers misinterpret their struggling as technical errors in their strokes," she says. "Sometimes this is true but the root of the struggle immerses from the basics of not truly being comfortable in the element of water.



Everyone can learn to love the water and swim for exercise or a triathlon; however, first they must humble themselves and learn that as humans we are not well adapted to it. If given the proper tools and if we spend adequate time learning the foundations of the three C's—comfort, control and confidence—we can learn to do great things."

For swimmers at the TI weekend workshops, the objective is the same: comfort, control and confidence. For two days, students spend time in the pool and in the classroom going over drills and getting feedback from instructors. Students are there for a variety of reasons: some suffered through triathlon swims, some were marathon runners switching over, some were training for a new job or wanted to do a better job training others how to swim, and some just wanted to learn how to swim for fun. One participant, Pamela Pulliam, 49, teaches Red Cross Swimming (RCS) in Iowa and came to Chicago for a weekend workshop. "The difference," says Pulliam, "is that RCS emphasizes strength in arms and legs and teaches swimmers to turn their head instead of rolling for air. Red Cross

versus TI is the basic barge and vessel comparison...This [TI] is such an easy way because you don't have to be strong in upper or lower body" to benefit from it. Jeffrey S. Aldrich, 37, of Chicago was a self-taught swimmer before the workshop who improved by taking bits and pieces of advice from more experienced swimmers. "I hadn't swum in over a year (I was deployed in the Middle East with the military), and I thought it would be a good time to start fresh and learn an efficient way to swim."

The workshop leaders stress learning to swim as a journey. The process is technical; it requires full-body coordination. Mindful and thoughtful swimming are encouraged over distance. Yoga, karate, and dance all employ this same kind of mindful practice and self-awareness. Just when it seems too artsy, the instructors use simple physics: flat barges go slowly, but aerodynamic boats go fast; the longer and more streamlined the vessel, the faster it goes. Think cigarette boat.

Swimmers who don't have a whole weekend to devote to swimming can take hour-long lessons like those offered by John Fitzpatrick of