

2012 U.S. Masters Swimming Annual Convention
Rob Butcher, Executive Director
Convention Address
September 13, 2012

Our opening video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XulKrmc-rzw&feature=plcp>

A big round of applause for Ben Christoffel who created that video. His video last year, “We are USMS”, won a Telly which is the internet version of an Emmy so we have high expectations when we share with you.

Five years ago was my first convention. I remember not having much of a clue what to expect. I was nervous. Wet behind the ears to this convention experience. I was expected to give an address to you. I have to tell you, I wish Ed’s new delegate presentation had been available then. He takes such pride in making sure that our delegates, especially the first time delegates, have a level of comfort in this experience. As Ed shared, please don’t hesitate to ask questions.

When we created the video, we had to keep it to about 3 minutes. But there is an impressive backdrop to our story so if you’ll indulge me a few moments, I’ll do my best to provide a little more commentary.

The whole idea of adult swimming came from a survey. You heard John Spannuth’s name in the video. In 1968, John was the newly elected President of the American Swimming Coaches Association. John sent a survey to some 2,000 or so coaches. He asked them for ideas of what ASCA could do to better support swimming. And in comes this idea from Dr. Ransom Arthur. Sponsor a “Committee of swimming for older ages.” You see, Ransom was a lifelong swimmer and a medical doctor. He was watching adults die from heart attacks noticing a missing ingredient in their lives; exercise, and in particular his favorite exercise of swimming. He published a report, this report right here.

If you’ve ever met John Spannuth, you know he loves ideas. The bigger the idea, the better. John decides this is a good idea so he sponsors an adult swimming committee.

In 1970, John and Ransom decided to host an adult swim meet. The idea was that some adults would need competition as a carrot to exercise so they played along. As the video shared, 47 adults showed up in Amarillo, Texas for what is billed as the first Masters swimmer meet. A funny thing happened at that first meet. Two of the four guys false started in the very first heat. John and Ransom told them, don't worry... take your time... we'll wait for you to get on the blocks and start again. That was their attitude, they just wanted adults to swim.

By the way, do you know where the term Masters came from? Ransom had heard the adjective used in track and field. He liked it so Masters swimming was coined.

Well, that first Masters swim meet spawned others. The next year, Judge Bob Beach decides to put on a meet in St. Pete. That meet is still going and is the longest running continuous Masters meet. In 1971, we went back to Amarillo for the 2nd Masters Nationals. And then in 1972, the legendary Doc Councilman, who was a huge supporter of Masters swimming, hosts a long course nationals at Indiana University.

As the 1970s progressed, it was a time of "figuring out" for Masters swimming. John Spanuth, our biggest champion, went to work for the AAU. The AAU at that time was the big kid on the block sponsoring most if not all of the sports that were in the Olympics. John and Ransom tried with all their enthusiasm and might, and despite heavy objections, finally got the AAU to sponsor a Masters swimming committee. The AAU sponsorship was important because it lent credibility to Masters swimming.

In 1978, Masters swimming came out from the AAU umbrella to become it's own self-governed organization. Ted Haartz, who is here, filed our USMS incorporation papers. June Krauser, considered the mother of Masters swimming, wrote and published SwimMaster as well as our first Rule Book. This is an actual copy from the 1973 SwimMaster. Paul Huttinger was a regular contributor on issues of sports medicine and training. And many others volunteered countless hours to help get Masters going.

In the 1980s USMS was admitted into United States Aquatic Sports or USAS. As Ed shared, USAS is

our communication voice to FINA. What's really important to know is that USMS to this day remains the only Masters governing body in the world with such a distinction. We truly are unique.

When we turn the calendar to the 1990s, USMS took a leadership position hosting the first FINA Masters World Championship. We launched our website usms.org which has gone on to become the foremost online authority for all things Masters. And seeds of change were planted into our governance process.

Then comes the millennium decade. We again host a FINA Masters World Championship at Stanford University. Our board structure is reorganized. We introduced online registration and new technology is ushered in. And with more responsibility and new opportunity, the transition begins from a volunteer operated to a volunteer governed and staff managed organization.

In 2007, prior to the hiring of an executive director, and our decision to migrate towards a staff system we had two full time employees in Tracy Grilli and Jim Matysek. We had a few contractors such as Mel Goldstein. All were working from their homes. We had no headquarters. We didn't even have an employee handbook. But we saw opportunity and the plan was taking shape.

We had this budding program created by our Fitness Education Committee called Go The Distance. Go The Distance is really a pretty neat idea, to participate, you simply e-mailed the amount of laps or distance you would swim. The results were tabulated by volunteers and then sent back via e-mail. As participation grew, it became a labor-intensive project that our volunteers spent hundreds of hours managing by e-mail and with spreadsheets. Jim Matysek, our IT Director, then created an online program to administer Go The Distance. Today, with more than 3,000 members participating, logging miles everyday, Go The Distance is a big success story for us. Nike saw the value and became the signature partner giving away reward prizes as participants hit various milestones. And with continued staff support, this once heavy burden on volunteers has been lifted.

We wanted to improve the stories, pictures, and information in our magazine while ensuring ontime delivery so SWIMMER was moved in house. Each issue of SWIMMER now includes authentic features that speak to our wide interests, include thoughtful debate, and original product reviews

specifically for Masters swimmers. And you know, I used to have a standing column but we kicked it out knowing we had much better content! We created a monthly member newsletter, monthly coaches newsletter and bi monthly volunteer newsletter. A lot of the ideas we get from LMSC and club websites. We grew a social media program from nothing to more than 20,000 followers and a YouTube Channel that has had close to a quarter million views. Laura Hamel leads these initiatives for us with the intent that the content we share is relevant to Masters swimmers.

We had a huge void of a structured education program for Masters coaches. So, with volunteers from the coaches committee, we wrote, we teach, we maintain and we own a Masters coach certification program. It includes three Levels with more to come. Since 2010, we will have taught 25 times and more than 500 coaches have attended. You know what is so exciting to see, who is attending. 20% are a triathlete certified coaches wanting to grow their business. 30% are coaches who have been coaching Masters for less than 2 years. True story, back in June, we got an e-mail inquiry from Phil Baker. Phil was loosely swimming with a group calling itself a Masters program at the University of Tennessee at Memphis. Phil has a full time job and is not a trained coach. But, he swam in high school so those he was swimming with looked to him as their leader. Phil wanted to know how he could grow the program. He found the USMS website and e-mailed us. Bill Brenner spent time on the phone with Phil and convinced him to come to the Indianapolis certification. Phil sat in the front row scribbling away notes. Prior to attending, he had no idea what USMS was or what we offered. Now, he does and he knows where to turn for support. His program is a registered club. Does the Phil story sound familiar to you? There are hundreds if not thousands of Phil's out there. They are hungry for information. They are ones calling our Club Development team. Our Masters coach certification program is taking education to them. Now, we've been asked if coach certification will be available online. I guess if we wanted to check a box and pile up numbers we could do that. But that would miss the intent, which is to truly educate and empower anyone desiring to coach about USMS so they can improve or add to the program where they swim. And part of the secret sauce to the education process is the peer interaction and networking the participants get with each other and with our expert instructors. Instructors such as Scott Bay, Stu Kahn, Cokie Lepinski, Kris Houchens, Doug Green, Mel Goldstein, and Bill Brenner. Yes, we are committed to empowerment through education.

Speaking of education, our USMS website had more than 2.4 million visits last year. That is a lot of

people looking for information on Masters swimming. Do you know one of the most visited pages on our website? The getting started page. What bothered us is that the majority of folks who visited that page didn't go anywhere else. It's something we are curing with our website redesign. We are going to make it easy for those interested in swimming, especially those new or curious about Masters swimming, to get around the website and get connected with a local program. Be on the lookout for our site redesign before the end of the year.

Part of our What's Next is we want to provide more attention to our partnerships and grow new ones. We saw the seeds of partnership produce fruit when we partnered with USA Swimming, Marriott, Myrtha Pools and the Nebraska LMSC to host our 2012 nationals in the trials venue. I have to tell you, two heroes in the Omaha experience were Tom Boak and Erin Sullivan. We've done big before but this was really outside the box. Because of the all complexities and details of dealing with a convention center, a professional concessionaire and temporary pool, it had the potential to get financially messy. But with Tom's meet director experience and financial discipline, we pulled off a successful experience that met all our expectations including better than expected financial performance. Thank you, Tom and Erin, job well done.

Since 1998, we've had our charitable endowment fund supporting various Masters related causes. In 2010, we created the Swimming Saves Lives Foundation. But it's searching for a purpose. A cause. Something that really resonates... something we can all support... and something that can have a legacy impact.

Let me ask you, what do you tell your neighbor when you are shuffling off to a pool or open water swim? What do you tell your co-worker when it's your lunch break and sneak out for a swim? Or what do you tell the person standing next to you in the grocery store when they see you wearing a Masters swimming t-shirt with your hair all wet?

Quite simply, you tell them I'm swimming. And I'm having fun. And I hope you too will come swim with us.

Study, after study, after study espouses the benefits of exercise. It's good for weight loss. It's good for

stress relief. It's good for making new friends. The Sporting Goods Manufacturer Association, says that swimming is one of the most aspirational activities for adults meaning swimming is a form of exercise adults desire to do. And as Parade magazine once said, swimming is good for the libido.

What is troubling though, is the CDC estimates 37% of adults can't swim the length of a pool. We know many of you have a Get Wet or learn to swim type program. You are doing your part to encourage adults to swim. And we want to help you. In the past year, we tested our ability to provide adult swim lesson support by partnering with three USMS clubs, GrandStrand Masters, Simon's Rock Pace Masters and Walnut Creek Masters. Each club found the pool space, each created their own lesson curriculum, each provided a safe and comfortable environment using their local Masters swimmers to teach other adults. USMS provided t-shirts, caps, and banners. More than 200 adults learned through their efforts. It seems like we have a formula coming together with our Foundation that can be replicated to other USMS programs. As Doug Church so appropriately said, big oaks from little acorns.

We've come a long way since John's survey in 1968 and Ransom's suggestion to sponsor an adult swimming committee. We are on the door step of 60,000 USMS members. Between clubs and chapters, there are more than 1,000 locations offering Masters programs. Our budget since 2007 has grown from \$1.2 million to around \$2.6 million. And balanced might we add!

I hear the accolades thrown at me and I just personally want to duck. I duck because I want you to know and see the special people that are part of the national office making it happen. They are the ones who deserve the appreciation. Would the staff please stand for a moment. They are as passionate about USMS as you are. E-mail Anna Lea or Tracy at 10:30 on a Friday night and you are likely to get the information you need, in 15 minutes or less. Place an order for marketing materials through Kyle or expense reimbursement with Susan and within a few days it is on your doorstep. Our IT team of Jim, Luke and Jeff are migrating much of paper processes to online. If you need an official or timer at your next meet, Laura would scratch her events and jump in to help without a second thought. Bill and Mel have been to 26 states and visited more than 100 pool decks empowering coaches and providing support.

We have this attitude because we all share the purpose, the same idea Ransom had in 1968, to Encourage Adults to Swim.

May this be the best USMS convention yet.

Thank you and see you throughout the weekend.