



OA GIVES BACK: CALIFORNIA CLUB RAISES MONEY FOR SWIMMERS IN SWAZILAND



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Swaziland, an African country with a population of just over 1.1 million, is thousands of miles away from California.

But as far as Orinda Aquatics (Moraga, California) Head Coach Don Heidary is concerned, the small nation, which is about the size of New Jersey, is a part of his swimming community.

"I had virtually no knowledge of Africa beyond what one would read in the newspaper or see on television," Heidary said. "The country can be driven through in a day. It is comprised of breathtakingly beautiful green countryside, rolling hills, and the most gracious people I have ever encountered. The purpose of our trip was to help educate this humble swimming community, and as is all too often the case, we were the ones educated."

His connection to Swaziland originated when a former club swimmer went there on a mission trip after high school. Through email, she told Heidary about a team she swam with there and asked if the Orinda team could do something to help them.

The original plan was for the coach from the Swazi team to come to California and spend a couple of weeks with the team. When the coach's visa was denied, Heidary traveled there in January 2010, and based upon what he witnessed and the friendships that he made during his stay, he and Orinda made a commitment to help support their swimming programs.

This June, as a means to raise money, Orinda is holding Character Camp I with a goal of raising \$5,000 for Swaziland swimming -- all the while helping create better young people in and out of the water in his own community.

The funds will then go to help purchase swimming equipment, a pace clock, lane lines and

swimsuits for the children -- many of whom swim in their underwear because they can't afford suits -- among other things.

"So far, we've collected 2,500 suits and hundreds of pairs of goggles, caps and swimwear already," Heidary said. "Orinda Aquatics sponsored the coach to attend the American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) clinic last year in Indianapolis, which was the first time a coach from Swaziland had attended the world clinic.

"I know there are countless needs and causes in the world, and they exist in our own communities as well. This is not a humanitarian effort, and it is not monetary. To me, this is about supporting children to enjoy the immeasurable benefits of our great sport."

Character Camp -- a four-day instructional, behavioral session -- will focus on in-water technique as well as include a "classroom/meeting" portion. The wet or aquatic track will cover all aspects crucial to swimming development, including high-character training (understanding and discipline); technical fundamentals (short axis and long axis balance and progressions); training and racing around walls (starts, turns, finishes, streamlining); and race strategy (pace and breathing).

The dry or personal side will cover non-swimming areas, such as putting character first in swimming and in life; goal-setting and seeing the big picture; the parental role and support (this includes parents and swimmers); and the swimming world and its role in high school, USS, college and beyond.

Considering Orinda's "Character First" philosophy, this camp is a way to reinforce those ideals and values held in high regard by coaches, parents and swimmers -- and a way to give back to a struggling swimming program in an impoverished country.

The cost for the camp is \$100, which is a direct donation to support swimming in Swaziland. Each swimmer receives a T-shirt and cap. Swimmers must be age 10 and up, and as is the rule with all Orinda activities, all swimmers "must be mature, dedicated athletes with a positive attendance history and times at the Silver level or better."

"The main objective for this camp is not so much related to our team but to the community," Heidary said. "There are about 3,000 summer league/rec swimmers in our area, and at that level, you often see kids learning unhealthy traits or characteristics as they relate to youth sports.

"As our character theme has evolved over the years, we have tried to do or introduce different things related to character development in young athletes," Heidary said. "Our philosophy is the better the person, the better the athlete, the better the swimmer, and it goes without saying, the team will be a very positive environment."

Heidary said the camp emphasizes things like humility, work ethic, team commitment, leadership and positive attitudes at all times. He went to add that, while the camp hasn't been marketed yet, the response from parents and coaches has been very positive. "They (parents and coaches) would like to see these traits in their children/athletes," Heidary said. "And both parents and coaches acknowledge that hearing this message from others helps to reinforce it.

"We know very well that swimmers are remarkable individuals and most-impressive student athletes, but even the greatest examples of this embrace the character model. It is our hope that we will not only help young adults become high-character athletes, but they also will ultimately become leaders on collegiate teams."