

WINTER 2016

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# SWIMSWAMI

RACE SWAMI'S COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

## SWAMI'S SWIM-A-THON A HUGE SUCCESS

Race Swami hosted its first USA Swimming-sponsored Swim-a-Thon this past summer. The goal was to raise enough money to order Race Swami team sweatshirts for all members of the nonprofit program serving Salt Lake City's west side communities.

Participants earned money by swimming lengths of the swimming pool. The Race Swami swimmers had a one-hour period in which to swim a maximum number of lengths. The children got pledges from family, neighbors and businesses to support their efforts. Donors either pledged a certain amount of money per length, or they made a flat donation in support of the team. For Race Swami, it was a rousing success, as the program raised over \$5,000—more than the goal amount of \$3500 the team was hoping to raise.

According to co-founder and Swim-a-Thon coordinator, Mary Chris Finnigan, each Race Swami swimmer needed to raise about \$50 dollars in order to garner enough money to cover the cost of the sweatshirts. As it turned out, many swimmers raised significantly more than the goal amount, some turning in more than \$100. "It was so awesome, and the kids really took ownership of this project," Mary Chris said. "To see their faces after finding out how much they did raise was amazing; they were so proud of themselves."

As it turned out, with the extra money raised, the team was able to produce a quality sweatshirt with some beautiful embroidery work. Each of the forest green sweatshirts was hand stitched on the front in metallic gold lettering over white, with the swimmers' names embroidered in script on the left sleeve underneath the familiar Swami fleur de lis logo.

"They look very elegant and in a way, timeless, with the use



**Top:** 8-year old Glen shows off his certificate after swimming nearly 100 lengths in one hour. **Bottom:** Nora shows off her new Race Swami hoodie, which the swimmers earned after raising money from their USA-sponsored Swim-a-Thon.

of an old style typeface that looks bold and authentic, emblazoned across the front chest," Mary Chris said. "As a team, that's what we were striving for—something that our

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# THE ULTIMATE SWAMI

Swami Swimmers take to journaling their journey

On a crisp fall day in October 2014, as the new short course swim season unfolded, Race Swami head coach Matt Finnigan thumbed through some archives of swim notes, newsletters, and binders full of practices he had kept from past seasons, preparing his Junior Swami swimmers for the pending season. Then he came across some of his old swim journals from when he was an age group swimmer growing up in Los Altos, California.

There were pages upon pages of recorded practices—made up of some unbelievable sets. Also stuffed in the journals were handouts that Matt's swim coach, Kevin Perry, had laboriously put together for his swimmers—covering subjects including sports psychology, nutrition, and most of all—character building exercises. That's when the light bulb went on for Finnigan. From there, he quickly wrote down some notes, drew up some sketches, and went to work.

What followed was a swim journal Finnigan titled, *"The Ultimate Swami, A Personal Guide to Becoming Your Very Best."* The guide is a chapter-by-chapter booklet covering such topics as character-building, team-bonding, goal-setting, self-evaluation, team philosophy, life changing scenarios, and a wealth of other personal growth enhancing material.

"I felt like I didn't just want to talk about what it means to be a 'SWAMI,'" Finnigan said, "but to better illustrate what it means to be part of this program. We can talk and talk and talk about what we expect from our kids who join the program, but sometimes that's all it is—it's just talk. We wanted to help facilitate what it all means, how we want our kids to act, what our expectations are of them. Why it's uncool and divisive to complain. The journal covers stuff like that. We set high expectations, but now they have a guide to help them reach that standard."

Another great aspect of the journal is that it is interactive. SWAMIs must answer a series of exercises which are relevant to each chapter. There are also areas for athletes to record their times, grade themselves after each practice, offer their input to such things as team activities, share their favorite sets, and list the goals they hope to achieve in practices and at meets.

At the end of each month, Finnigan collects the journals from his swimmers and reads through each one. Then—much as his own coach did—Finnigan offers his 2 cents (usually a page or more) to each swimmer. His comments include an assessment of how each swimmer is doing and suggestions on what areas the swimmer should focus on to better himself or herself—swimming or otherwise. In other words, *The Ultimate Swami* serves as a hybrid, personal journal on steroids.

“Some people say I might have taken this idea from some of the stuff USA Swimming offers to age groupers on a national level, but it’s not even close,” Finnigan says. “We cover some swimming, but it’s really about character and doing the right thing in life. There might be some cool stories I’ll borrow from them and credit them for, but otherwise, most of what I stole, I stole from Kevin Perry, my coach and mentor growing up.”

According to Finnigan, the swim journals were an integral part of his team’s growth through junior high and high school. If they didn’t turn their journal into Perry when it was requested, they were admonished for it.

“You never crossed Kevin when it came to stuff like that. It was important to him, so it was important to us,” he said. “KP was way ahead of his time in terms of the psychological approach to swimming. He wanted to know precisely what made each of his swimmers tick so that allowed him to grow as a coach as much as it was meant for us to grow. And the truth is, I loved keeping those journals each season. I still have most of the journals I wrote, and thankfully, there’s a lot of great feedback written by Kevin—and from me. It surely allows me, the coach, to see firsthand what was going through the head of a 14, 15, 16 year old. It’s invaluable stuff and allows me to write this guide specifically for age groupers. I want them to think, and to know firsthand that this is more than just about swimming. It’s character-enhancing material when you get right down to it.”

The booklet will continue to grow as the group does. Currently there are 24 pages, but the plan is to have a 100 page guide which the kids can keep long after their swimming career is over. “It’s like a keepsake,” Finnigan said. “I know how much I treasure my own journals, so hopefully, they will too.”

There were more than 30 posters of Race Swami swimmers’ profiles featured at the Race Swami Fiesta event in April, 2015 >

## SWAMI CREATES POSITIVE BUZZ WITH 2ND FIESTA BENEFIT

Race Swami held its second SWAMI FIESTA in front of a crowd of more than 100 people, hoping to better tell its story in serving low-income youth who call the west side neighborhoods of Glendale, Rose Park, Poplar Grove and surrounding neighborhoods home. The event was held on April 25th at Frida Bistro.

Among the speakers were Race Swami Executive Director and Head Coach, Matt Finnigan, who shared a heart-wrenching story about one Swami who had drowned prior to joining the program, and Claudia Corona, a Race Swami parent who shared her son Jesus’ experiences since joining the team four years ago. Claudia had the crowd in tears as she told stories of what the Swami community means to her family. She urged attendees to give from their hearts, as Race Swami has made all the difference for so many children.

“You do this because it’s right,” Claudia told the crowd. “You do this to help good kids from good families grow up to continue being good people. Please continue to help us because you make it possible for our kids!”

The night included a Race Swami video highlighting the program, as well as some great food provided by Frida Bistro. The night was capped with some spirited line dancing from the event-goers.

According to event coordinator and Race Swami board member Julie Lu, the evening turned out as well as it could have. “This amazing program which serves low-income children really benefits from the outpouring love from our community—whether we live on the east bench or the west side neighborhoods. The bottom line is people are providing these children with the opportunity they otherwise wouldn’t have. It’s tremendous and we hope to keep building on this exposure.”



Aisha, Age 9

Group: Rising Swami 2  
Favorite Stroke: Butterfly

Before each race  
I just tell myself,  
believe in yourself  
that you can do it  
and never say never.  
I love swimming and  
I love Race Swami!



Race Swami girls finished 1st place overall at a recent Invitational swim meet held in Murray, Utah.

## RACE SWAMI GIRLS TEAM WINS MAC THANKSGIVING INVITATIONAL SWIM TITLE

The annual Murray Aquatic Club Thanksgiving Invitational, held on November 20th and 21st, was a water mark victory for the Race Swami girls' team, who finished **1st Place** overall out of a field of more than 20 teams. The Thanksgiving Invitational is a three-decade old tradition in Salt Lake Valley swimming, and has been hosted by the Murray Aquatic Club for over thirty years. The meet was held at the Murray Aquatic Center in Murray Park.

A bonanza of personal best times were recorded throughout the meet, and some State qualifying times were met by a few of the SWAMI swimmers as well. The Boys Team finished 9th overall, great considering the small number of male swimmers Swami had at the meet.

For Race Swami, this marked the first time in the team's five year existence that it finished 1st, a huge achievement for a team that has been built from a majority of children with no previous swimming experience and families coming from the local neighborhoods.

Currently, the team is gearing up for the Utah Age Group State Championships, which will be held at the South Davis Aquatic Center in Bountiful, Utah March 16th-19th.

## SWIM-A-THON SUCCESS

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kids could feel proud of and take pride in wearing."

According to Leslie Motley, Race Swami team president, the sweat-shirts were well received. "Our swimmers wear them everywhere—to the pool for sure. But they also wear them to school, to their church, at all our team functions. At the mall. They love them and they are really proud of the fact that they made this happen—that they raised the money they needed to make this happen. And best of all, our kids finally have a team sweatshirt that they can wear to the swim meets and look really awesome at the same time!"

# swimswami

**You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.**

**Jane Goodall**

**(Excerpt from The Ultimate Swami Handbook)**



The Race Swami Community poses for a group photo after collecting 120 bags for the Candy Cane Corner

## SWAMIS GIVING BACK!

Each year during the holiday season Race Swami teams up with The Road Home to help collect and put holiday packages together for those in need at the Candy Candy Corner. This year, more SWAMIs than ever showed up for the program's Service Project, collecting toys, warm clothing, coloring books, and dolls.

The team gathered on a cold, December Saturday morning at the old Granite High School, where Candy Cane Corner was set up for the 2015 Holiday Season. After the group was briefed about all the great services The Road Home provides displaced families in need, the kids, parents, and coaches went to work.

A little more than an hour later, 120 bags had been registered each with an assortment of goodies that included warm clothes and plenty of toys and fun for the kids.

10 year old Race Swami swimmer Caroline Cooper enjoyed the experience, exclaiming, "this was the most fun team activity every year because we have a good time organizing these bags, knowing it will help put a smile on the faces of other kids our age."

After the team finished it's service project, swimmers headed to the Northwest Recreation Center for a team-wide practice, with all groups and levels participating at once.