

TEAM EFFORT

A Family of Tingleys Boosts Kentucky Masters

by Bekah Wright >>> Photos by Peter Bick

When Bill Tingley was swimming backstroke as an age grouper in Louisville, Ky., some 40 years ago, it never occurred to him that he would one day help put Masters swimming on the map in Kentucky. But in

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retrospect, his role in building teams and becoming the long-time chairman of a 500-member strong local masters swimming committee (LMSC) was practically predestined.

Back in the 1950s, Bill's mother, Joanne, recalls packing up her four young children—Bill, Jack, Linda, Mary—and heading to Lakeside Swim Club where the children's father, Lewis, began swimming in the 1930s. The kids took to

the water like, well, fish. "They all four have gills," says Joanne. For the Tingley children, those afternoons led to competitive swimming from primary school through college, and now Masters.

While at Southern Illinois University, Bill Tingley earned NCAA All-American honors in the 100-yard backstroke, 400 medley relay and 800-yard free relay multiple times in the early 1970s, and later would be inducted into the SIU Swimming Hall of Fame.

It was 1977 when Tingley noticed that his post-college break from swimming had resulted in some extra pounds. After seeing a public service announcement about a Masters program at the YMCA in Lexington, Ky., where he'd settled, he decided to drop in on a workout. "Eight people showed up," he recounts.

"They made me coach." The team prospered, becoming Lexington's Wildcat Masters. Twenty-five years later, Tingley's still coaching deck side: "If someone told me back in the '80s I'd be involved with Masters swimming at the national level and have over 100 swimmers, I would've said they were crazy."

Back then, things were different in the Masters world. "When I started, the sport was very young," says Tingley. "I've had to grow with it." He hasn't

been alone in this pursuit. "It's an acquired passion for me and the people around me." Those people include three generations of Tingleys who've been instrumental in the development of Kentucky Masters.

Building team numbers. In 1979 Tingley's sister, Mary Tingley Graves, was hired as aquatic director for Tom Sawyer State Park on the outskirts of Louisville, Ky. The next year, she followed in her brother's footsteps by forming Tom Sawyer Masters.

In those beginning days in the '80s, Graves recruited members in several ways, including advertising in the neighborhood as well as in the

Three generations of Tingleys (left to right): **MARY TINGLEY GRAVES, JOANNE TINGLEY, BILL TINGLEY** and Bill's son, **CHRIS**. Mary, Bill and Chris comprise three-quarters of the coaching staff at Lakeside Swim Club. Joanne—who has a long history as a KY-LMSC administrator—has been dubbed the "Queen of Kentucky Masters."





local newspaper sports section. She worded the ads carefully, leading off with “lap swimming.”

“My goal was to get people to come and swim laps,” she says. “If they enjoyed the team atmosphere, they could join in. If they didn’t, they could swim on their own.” Graves continued holding lap swims simultaneously with Masters workouts. Similar to her advertising philosophy was her workout direction. “Competitive swimmers who come into programs

already understand when you say, ‘We’re going to be doing sets on a specific interval,’” she states. “But when you have a novice, they have no idea what you’re talking about, so you have to have the capability to start from scratch.”

Graves used a personal approach as well, enlisting everyone from the parents of her age-group swim team to walk-ins. “If I saw someone at the facility swimming laps, I’d



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ask them if they’d like to become part of the swim program,” she says. “Some did. Others didn’t. The ones who did stuck with us because we swam on a year-round basis.”

Meanwhile, brother Bill’s work as a photojournalist brought him back to his hometown of Louisville in 1981, and he quickly became involved in the coaching and leadership of Lakeside Masters, a team formed five years earlier. Tingley found he had to

approach team recruitment a bit differently than his sister. “Lakeside Swim Club is a private club, so people can’t walk in off the street and join,” he says. “I can only recruit from within.” The club, which has been in existence since 1924, has a long history with swimming, forming its first competitive team in 1928. This



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worked in Tingley’s favor as he built the Masters program.

“When I joined, there were many familiar faces I remembered from growing up at Lakeside,” says Lakeside member Amy Pope. “It was a diverse group of individuals who had various levels of interest in swimming. Some were former swimmers getting back into shape, others were swimming for fitness, and there were a few triathletes as well.”

Other club members saw Masters workouts under way and got onboard. Age-group team members who wanted to continue swimming competitively after their teens turned to the program as well. So did “swim parents.”

“Lakeside Masters has an underlying theme of family,” says Tingley. “Within our 100 swimmers we’ve got seven husbands and wives, four sets of siblings and seven parent/child situations.”

The family component attracted Debbie Utz. A synchronized swimmer, Utz was initially recruited by Graves to join Tom Sawyer Masters, eventually moving over to Lakeside Masters. “In 1991, I went to the nationals in Elizabethtown, Ky., with my 7-year-old pushing my 3-month-old in a stroller,” she

recalls. “I swam the mile with my baby crying the entire time. Swimmers from all over came to quiet the baby, but Lakeside swimmers took over holding him so I could finish my swim. I decided they were the team I needed.”

The social aspect of both Kentucky Masters teams kept members coming. For Tom Sawyer Masters, dinner was *de rigueur* after Tuesday and Thursday night workouts. Both teams had picnics and holiday parties. Road trips to meets added to the sense of camaraderie. “People see us having a good time working out,” says Tingley. “We’re a community of swimmers, some who have been on the team for almost 20 years. I think these are the reasons we have the retention rate we do.”

When it comes to team and club success, Tingley, who was the 1989 USMS Coach of the Year and the 1998 Ransom Arthur Award winner, has a rule of thumb. “The best marketing tool is a coach on deck who gives swimmers a structured workout, teaches them proper stroke technique and the components of competitive swimming. Then swimmers will flourish.”

Nevertheless, Tingley’s leadership shouldn’t be underestimated. He was instrumental in bringing the 1991 USAS convention to Louisville and the USMS Long Course National Championships to Elizabethtown that same year, giving Kentucky swimmers a chance to show their stuff. And show they did, with Lakeside winning the USMS Large Division championship.

Building an organization. With regard to structuring Masters teams, Tingley and Graves had dissimilar experiences. “I had the good fortune of being a former competitive swimmer who’d studied management at school,” says Graves. “So I had a base knowledge of how to organize a swim team.” In addition, she was working for a state park system that supported the Masters program. “I was on

salary as the aquatic director so there was very limited overhead,” she says. “We had a \$2 admission fee, and when we traveled to swim meets, the swimmers took care of their own expenses.”

For teams in similar situations, she advises they be on the same page as their facility. “We [Masters] do require a lot of pool space, so coordinating swim practice times with the aquatic director or facility operator is critical.”

In Tingley’s case, Lakeside Masters is governed by a board of directors elected by the Masters team. “I’m involved in scheduling and directing workouts and competitions,” he says. “Our board and staff actually operate the team.” Four coaches are on board, including Graves, who became Lakeside Club’s manager of aquatic operation in 1982, Marty O’Toole (upper right in dark blue shirt) and Tingley’s college-age son, Chris. Each has day jobs and other responsibilities, so good communication and coordination are required to ensure all workouts are covered. “Over the years I have learned to make time both as a coach and as a swimmer,” says Tingley. “If you don’t, you’ll eventually walk away from it.”

For teams looking to become solvent, Tingley believes this can be accomplished within a year if swimmers are in place. “Whoever is operating the team needs to know how many swimmers it’s going to take to break even,” he says. “Recruit that number first, then develop a business plan and fee structure. Otherwise, the costs will run you over.”

Building a program. Along with structuring a program come decisions about workouts. “There should be a minimum of three and a half hours, and a max of 10 hours a week, with two workouts a day to produce the great swimmers we see in Masters,” says Tingley. At Lakeside, the number of weekly workouts continues to



change. “We’ve got nine workouts a week—three in the morning, two at noon, two at night and two on Sunday,” he says. “We’ve just added two this winter because the demand is there.” The club strives to have water time available for the swimmer who wants to swim everyday with one day off.

Coaching is, of course, vital to the club’s success. Members like Pope look to coaches to help their swimming progress, especially when life and schedule changes alter their routines. “In my early years, I was able to train consistently and travel to all of the meets,” says Pope. Things changed for her with the advent of working full-time and motherhood. “My lane mates and I joke that when we reach the 60-65 age group, maybe we’ll have time to train and put our awesome 800 freestyle relay back together.”

Coaches like Tingley are aware of the challenges that Masters swimmers face and are ready with a game plan. “Over the years, as we age and move through our lives, things change,” he says. “Someone has to help you modify or refine your stroke to those changes



Lakeside Club Notables

- Private club with approximately 9,000 members of all ages
- Lakeside Masters formed in 1976
- Facilities: 3-acre filtered lake, with an outdoor 10-lane, 50-meter course and a winter 8-lane, 25-meter course
- Fielded a competitive swim team since 1928
- Hosted National Championships in 1937
- Developed seven Olympians: Ann Hardin and Mary Moorman (1940), Hardin and Moorman (1944), Camille Wright (1976), Lisa Buese and Mary T. Meagher (1980), Meagher and Tori Trees (1984), Meagher (1988) and Rachel Komisarz (2004)

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both physically and, to a certain degree, within your life itself." Keeping swimmers abreast of new techniques is also important. Lakeside Masters hosts workshops throughout the year with this in mind.

When it comes to competition, Lakeside Masters reviews upcoming events for swimmers who want to compete. "We have to look at the team needs from competition and events standpoints," says Tingley. As the team interests change, so do their event choices. Steadfast are the four meets Lakeside Masters hosts annually, including the summertime Lakeside Invitational, now in its 30th year held in the facility's 3.5-million-gallon quarry-turned-filtered lake.

Out of Lakeside's 100 team members, 30 to 40 participate in competitive events throughout the year. "Even a slow swimmer

like myself has been to meets with good finishes," says Utz. "I wouldn't have tried to compete on that level, but because my teammates are supportive, I've participated more than I would have on my own." Workout components keep the team's spirits revved as well. "Bill sets up relays so we can get our Top 10 times, which motivates us to keep going," says Utz.

Building an LMSC. As with everything, there are politics that come with swimming. Tingley got his first taste of organizational challenges in 1980. Until that time, his Masters group had operated as a committee of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). "We were mandated by the U.S. Amateur Act to break up the AAU in 1978," he says. "We had to reform." Tingley was elected chairman of the USMS-affiliated Local Masters Swim Committee (KY-LMSC). "Politics are local,

and it's the same with Masters swimming," he says. "You have to have a local operation to make a team or club operate at its the best."

Administratively, KY-LMSC comes together through a group effort. "Even though I'm chairman, I don't feel as though I'm running the organization," says Tingley. "All of us are." That includes his mother, Joanne, who's been dubbed the "Queen of Kentucky Masters."

"I wore the hats of secretary, treasurer and registrar because you have to start somewhere," Joanne says of the KY-LMSC's beginnings. She went on to serve as state registrar for 24 years, retiring just last year. Her organizational wisdom from years of experience: "It takes one or two people who will devote themselves to administering the program. Somebody has to make it work. There has to be a leader."

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Mark Gill, USMS vice president of member services, attributes certain elements to LMSC success. "We recognize that growth in Masters swimming takes a well-organized LMSC, strong clubs and quality coaches," he says.

To help build a vibrant statewide organization, the KY-LMSC identifies pools with lap swimmers and some form of aquatic staffing, makes them aware of USMS and Masters swim programs, and then works with USMS to encourage the pool to develop a team. "Then you have to help them along," says Tingley. "Someone has to take responsibility and get those interested involved. Then the program will usually thrive."

Giving the organization a face is important, agrees Graves. "A lot of recreators don't know what Masters swimming is. We help open doors for them by contacting USMS to give them literature so they don't go into an appointment with a prospective aquatic director empty-handed. They'll have ammunition to say, 'This is what Masters swimming is. It's also a revenue source for your facility, excellent for public relations and a wonderful fitness and rehab-type program.'"

Success also breeds success. Since forming in 1977, Lexington's Wildcat Masters has grown from a team of 8 to 226. Tom Sawyer Masters has become Swim Louisville Area Masters, and the group that started with 20 members now has 82 on its roster, thanks to the guiding hand of coach Tom Mester. As for Lakeside Masters, their numbers have grown from 10 to 100 since 1976. It's a close-knit group with a strong sense of family that members credit to the Tingleys' leadership and unwavering commitment.

In 2003 at the Lakeside Masters Long Course Summer Invitational meet, three generations of Tingleys were on deck—Joanne; Bill and his son, Chris; and Mary and her son, Paul. Later that day, the crowd watched as several family members hit the blocks for a relay. As the swimmers took their laps, it was as if a legacy was playing out. A passing of the baton through the generations of Masters swimming. <<<

Masters Swimming in Kentucky

1976: Masters Swimming began in Kentucky with two clubs, Lakeside and Plantation. Both clubs had strong AAU clubs, and Masters, at that time, was a committee of AAU.

1981: Four clubs came together and formed KY-LMSC, with about 150 members.

2001: KY-LMSC boasts 11 clubs and 492 members. The local swim clubs give swimmers both local identity and local control over water time, development of club structure and recruitment.

2002: Swim Kentucky Masters (SKY) forms to expand Masters across the state. Eleven teams have coaching staffs.

2005: SKY grows to 521 swimmers in 15 local teams (workout groups). About 40 percent of swimmers compete locally; the rest are workout swimmers. The competition structure for SKY is such that if a Kentucky-sanctioned meet has more than 10 events, then members swim for their local teams. If a sanctioned meet has fewer than 10 events, then all members swim for SKY. When members swim at a meet outside of Kentucky, at USMS Nationals or at a neighboring LMSC, they swim under the SKY banner.