

## Clubs Built USMS From the Grassroots



Courtesy of Cindy Baxter

**> W**hen the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) opened its umbrella to Masters swimming in the fall of 1971, it didn't take long for good news to travel fast. Almost as quick as you can say "take your mark," the forerunners of today's large Masters clubs were ready, set, go.

Among the first were California's San Mateo Marlins (later San Mateo Masters Marlins), led by Ray and Zada Taft, and the Fremont Hills Swim Team (now Rinconada Masters), founded and coached by Cindy Baxter and Carol Macpherson, both instructors at the renowned Add Janes Swim School in Menlo Park, Calif.

Inspired by their experience at the 1972 Nationals hosted by the San Mateo Marlins,

Baxter and Macpherson were not about to let the excitement of an adult swim team slip from their grasp. "I said to Carol, if we can get it approved, would you ever want to coach with me," recalls Baxter, 74. "And you know what? I got all the paperwork, all of the approvals (from the Palo Alto Recreation Department) and we had 15 people join."

That was January 1973, says Macpherson, 68. "Some of those members are still with us today." From the beginning, Rinconada was about teamwork, holding rummage sales to pay travel expenses to Nationals. "We just tried so hard in those good ole days," Baxter adds.

But what fun it was, remembers Ann Kay Bennett, 72, an early member of the San

**RAY TAFT and ZADA TAFT** pass the coveted virtual Swim to Hawaii winner's paddle to **CAROL MACPHERSON and CINDY BAXTER.**

Mateo Masters Marlins and friend of the founders, who are now deceased. "The Tafts had a small teaching pool—20 yards long—and they had enough enthusiasm that it inspired all of us to start. Swimming was really their life."

Joining Masters swimming at age 36 was a freeing experience for Bennett. "For the first time in my life, I was allowed to be competitive. That was an exciting time," she notes. "After the meets, we'd go out and have pizza and beer together, which was always fun." It didn't take long for the club to skyrocket to

### MASTERS MEMORIES

**>>>** Before the USMS Postal, there was the virtual Swim to Hawaii created by Ray and Zada Taft of the San Mateo Masters Marlins in the 1970s and tightly contested with Rinconada Masters. Determined to win, Rinconada Coach Cindy Baxter required every swimmer on her team to track every yard swam for a solid month and write it down in a special book. "We won because we kept the best records," Baxter quips.

**>>>** Ann Kay Bennett, now with Menlo Masters, remembers traveling to an early meet with the San Mateo Masters Marlins and encountering "Betty Bikini," the first woman to wear a bikini in competition. The next year, a rule change forbade skimpy apparel. "That was pretty stringent, I thought," recalls Bennett.

**>>>** Once desperate for a swimmer to round out a relay team, Carol Macpherson pressed her 72-year-old mother into Masters service. "She had swam a bit at the Y, and I promised her that she only had to swim one lap." But to her mother's chagrin, Macpherson left out one tiny detail—the pool was 50 meters. But she did it. Now 96, Ellen Tait was the oldest competitor to swim the XI FINA World Masters Championships held at Stanford. Her event? The 50 free.

around 175 members.

By the late 1970s, Rinconada had more than 250 swimmers. "It just mushroomed," says Macpherson, who continues to coach the team today as well as run a swim school. "I just love swimming and I love competing," she says.

Baxter retired from coaching a few years ago, but not from swimming. "I competed in my first meet at age 40," she recalls. "I've come a long way since then." <<<