



**SWIMMER** Editor **BILL VOLCKENING** created the 2003 Chekhov design, with its play on language with the Russian writer. Volckening also conceived the 2004 eye chart. "This played on the concept of how people dread swimming the 200 butterfly," Volckening says. In 2005, the Federal Way Kings came up with the Mission: I.M.possible theme.

## Checking Out the Check-Off Challenge

**>A** friend, a car commercial and a Sharpie marker—these three things inspired Tracy Grilli to create the USMS Check-Off Challenge.

"In the early 1980s, [New England Masters swimmer] Stephanie Walsh [now, Beilman] told me her goal was to swim each event from a meet during a calendar year," remembers Grilli, USMS administrator.

This remark inspired Grilli's idea for a fitness event. "Then I saw a car commercial, which mentioned something about checkboxes," Grilli continues. "So I had the idea that people could swim an event, and get a check mark."

1993 was the first year of what came to be called the Check-Off Challenge. About 100 people participated that first year, Grilli says, "and New England Masters swimmers pretty much made up the 100 people."

Nearly 15 years later, participation has more than doubled, and more Masters teams are represented in the athletic endeavor. In 2006, 242 people participated in the Check-Off Challenge, reports Marcia Anziano, chair of the USMS Fitness Committee.

"People like this event because it's about individual goal setting, in a nonthreatening environment," Anziano says. "There are no time constraints, no officials, no stroke judges – you just have to do it [each of the 18 events of a regular swim meet]."

The Check-Off Challenge is based on the honor system. After a swimmer completes an event, he or she takes a waterproof permanent marker and checks the corresponding box beside that event on the current year's official Check-Off Challenge T-shirt.

The T-shirt has become a part of the USMS lore. Grilli and **SWIMMER** Editor Bill Volckening designed the T-shirts each year, Grilli says, up until the Check-Off Challenge became a USMS fitness event in 2002. After that, the T-shirt design has been designed by the local host of the event.

"There have been some creative designs over the years," Volckening says. He even conceived some of the early designs, including one with Anton Chekhov (2003) and another with an eye chart that says, "I am not afraid to swim the 200 butterfly" (2004). The Check-Off Challenge has something for every Masters

swimmer: a one-of-a-kind T-shirt keepsake; the opportunity to foster self-confidence by trying different events; and team building.

Ray Novitske of Alexandria Masters in Virginia first signed up for the Check-Off Challenge in the late '90s.

"It was back when we first started our team," he says. "The next year, I encouraged other people on the team to sign up." To motivate his teammates to complete the Check-Off Challenge, Novitske kept track of their statistics on the team Web site.

"The Check-Off Challenge is something people can do together, or on their own," Grilli says.

On an individual level, the Check-Off Challenge "encourages people to go a little further in their training," Anziano says. The end results? "Self-satisfaction and greater confidence."

"One woman from Australia or New Zealand, I don't know how she even found out about the Check-Off Challenge, told me, 'It's a motivator, and it gets you out of your comfort zone,'" Grilli says.

Volckening says the Check-Off Challenge is the longest-running fitness event in USMS history. <<<

### CHECKMATE

>>> There's still time for Masters swimmers to sign up for the 2008 Check-Off Challenge. Visit [www.usms.org/fitness](http://www.usms.org/fitness) for details.

>>> The Check-Off Challenge consists of the following events: 50 free, 100 free, 200 free, 400 or 500 free, 800 or 1000 free, 1500 or 1650 free, 50 back, 100 back, 200 back, 50 breast, 100 breast, 200 breast, 50 fly, 100 fly, 200 fly, 100 IM, 200 IM and 400 IM.

>>> "You can do the events in competitive or noncompetitive ways, such as during workouts or with friends," Marcia Anziano says.

>>> Alexandria Masters integrates the Check-Off Challenge in its swimming program, says team member Ray Novitske. "During workouts, we offer time to complete the events. We'll have a breaststroke week, for example, for two weeks, so people can complete the breaststroke events during that time."

>>> The Check-Off Challenge was held as a national fitness event in 2003. At that time, Pam Himstreet of Oregon Masters served as chair of the Fitness Committee, Bill Volckening as vice chair.

>>> In 2004, USMS began bidding out Check-Off Challenge hosting privileges to Masters teams (previously, New England Masters and Volckening administered the event). The Federal Way Kings have hosted the Check-Off Challenge from 2005-2007. However, Volckening notes, "the idea is to have the Check-Off Challenge go all around the country, so everyone can give it their own spin."

>>> "Most Masters swimmers get bored with workouts at some time or another," says Hugh Moore of Federal Way Kings. "Very few of us can swim well in all strokes and at all distances. The Check-off Challenge encourages swimmers to try something new, especially when they become bored with their regular workouts."