

Rob Butcher, Executive Director
Convention Address
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Olympic coaches. Age group coaches. Administrators. All were seated around a man in the center of the room. The tension was high. The man, in his navy blue military uniform, was getting grilled: “You’ll take up our precious lane space,” they chided. “You’ll professionalize our sport,” they said. “You’ll have people dying in pools.”

“You are correct. People die in many places. Some die walking across the street. Some die in their sleep. And some die during sexual relations.” In swimming terms, the charismatic Navy doctor had just Lezak’d them.

That was 1971. In Lake Placid, New York, and it was the AAU national meeting. Three years earlier, that same doctor sitting in the center of that room, Captain Ransom J. Arthur, had published a report stating that adults needed to exercise—that they needed to swim. John Spannuth, the national aquatics director for the AAU, agreed. John wanted the AAU to recognize Masters Swimming. His bosses didn’t. They threatened to fire him if he added Masters Swimming to the agenda. John, undeterred and a trailblazer in his own right, knew and believed in Ransom. And he believed in Ransom’s vision.

And so, on that day in 1971, Masters Swimming was accepted, albeit reluctantly, into the AAU. John Spannuth, the man who risked his job for the cause, became the committee chair. Knowing this wouldn’t be a one-person relay, John began assembling his leadership team: Ransom Arthur. Bob Beach. June Krauser. Paul Hutinger. Ted Haartz. Hal Onusseit. Roy Goddard. And others. If you asked any of them in 1971 if they thought Masters Swimming would become what it has today, I think they would have told you, “We just wanted to swim.”

Movements, movements of legacy, are grounded in causes that make society better, improve people’s lives, and transcend time. Try as some might, movements that make our world a better place just don’t get derailed. And this movement, our movement, is living proof. From 1971 to today, our purpose—our movement—remains the same. We encourage adults to swim.

Through the decades, we’ve made decisions that affect how we serve our purpose. In 1970, the first Masters Swimming competition was hosted, providing incentive for those whose motivation was competition. In 1988, USMS became a voting member of United States Aquatic Sports, providing us with FINA recognition. In 1996, we created usms.org, which has gone on to

become the leading resource on all things Masters. And in 2011, at Convention in Jacksonville, we adopted our strategic plan.

The creation of our strategic plan was not a simple task. First, it required extensive input from you, our dedicated volunteer leaders. Your feedback and ideas required much thought into understanding who we are and where we want to go. Three themes arose that provided the framework for the development of our strategic plan. First, double our membership and grow to 100,000. Second, establish a Foundation and grow it to ten million dollars, and use it to provide more opportunities for adults to swim. And third, define the role our volunteers will play in our newly developing structure.

Our strategic plan is published on our website, as is the documentation of the progress we're making. There are printed copies here as well. The plan defines our values and our strategies. I'd like to take a few moments to share some of the highlights and a glimpse of the future so that you have confidence that we're following the plan and being good stewards of the resources we've been entrusted with.

In 2009, we began the implementation of a \$2 per year dues increase program that would last for five years. The use of proceeds is multifold. One purpose, which is in direct alignment with the strategic plan, is to expand the menu of programs and services for members. An example of a new service is the Nike Go The Distance fitness program that now has nearly 4,000 members logging miles and receiving free prizes from Nike. Another is the online workouts authored by seven top-tier USMS coaches. One more is the *STREAMLINES* monthly e-newsletters that provide original content to help members improve their swimming experience. Participation and utilization of these services is entirely voluntary and we're seeing many of members enjoying these activities.

Naturally though, members are requesting more services, such as a USMS mobile app so they can stay better connected. And in order to keep our members coming back and attract new members, we need to continue to provide compelling reasons to join and rejoin USMS. We've studied other successful membership organizations, such as Triple A, and found that one of the most significant reasons for their success is that they provide discounts to businesses and services that matter to their members. There are common areas our members spend and consume services, too, such as health clubs and weight-loss chains. We know there is an opportunity to deliver more value through USMS member discounts.

During the strategic planning process, you told us the greatest threat to Masters Swimming was the loss of pool access. The National Swimming Pool Foundation estimates there are somewhere around 50,000 pools across the country that could be lap suitable. You want to know the really alarming stat? NSPF estimates that since 2010, 36% of them have shut down. 36%. Gone out of business. Lost opportunities for adults and others to swim.

In response to your concerns, WE invested resources to create and teach a Masters coach education program. In the past two years, our trained instructors have taught more than eleven hundred Masters coaches and aspiring coaches. Coaches who attend the certification continually tell us “Thank You.” Thank you giving us information that will make my Masters program better and allow me to attract more adult swimmers.

Educated Masters coaches are empowered. And empowered and knowledgeable Masters coaches are in the best position to maintain and grow their programs, which directly benefits USMS.

These same coaches have also told us they want more education, more empowerment, such as an adult learn-to-swim instructor program, or an annual Masters coach conference.

Within our education initiative, we have developed a program outreach service. The service is available, for free, to current Masters programs and those desiring to start a USMS program. Our trained club development professionals provide solutions to issues programs are facing and educate them on the resources USMS provides. Take Peluso Masters in Virginia. Peluso was doing just fine at its one location in Richmond. It had thirty or so Masters swimmers when it's head coach, Jay Peluso, called us wanting to know if we could help him get lane space in the new Greater Richmond Aquatic Partnership complex. We involved the LMSC leadership and made a site visit to both Peluso and the complex. Our trained club development team provided ideas to both of how a win/win partnership could be created. Now, 18-months later, Peluso has gone from thirty members to 198 and a positive partnership with the complex.

Masters programs operate in about 1,500 facilities. In the past two years, we've made more than 170 onsite visits to programs like Peluso Masters. We've visited the largest LMSCs and the smallest ones. We've been on deck with clubs and workout groups. We've made visits in the early morning before dawn, and the late evening after dark. We've been to nonprofits and for-profits. Biloxi, Mississippi. Alpert Jewish Community Center. West Hollywood Aquatics. Rice Aquatic Masters. John Jay College. Kroc Center in Coeur d'alene, Idaho. Shaker Masters.

MIT Masters. Vail Racquet Club. And so on. Those are not just dots on a map—they are real programs. We're helping empower and opening new doors so more adults can swim. The formula is really quite simple: show us a body of water, identify an individual or group of folks who will take ownership in the local Masters program, and we're on our way. We'll train you. We'll provide resources for you to grow. We'll track your progress. And although not every program needs a personal touch or an onsite visit, our Masters programs know that USMS is there for them.

Sometimes, though, our investments produce dividends that aren't easily tracked by spreadsheets. Consider Helen Naylor. Since 1998, Helen was loosely coaching her Masters program at Vanderbilt. Helen attended the 2011 Masters coach certification in Indianapolis. She spent a day immersed with our professional instructors and networking with her Masters coach peers. So excited and empowered was Helen, that later that year she hosted a Masters coach certification at Vanderbilt. Still, Helen sought opportunities to give back. Helen is now an educated volunteer and the Chair of the Southeastern LMSC.

Another area we have invested is in marketing and promoting USMS. Our marketing investments have been on multiple layers. Some may wonder how local programs benefit from USMS marketing. Since the USMS website was redesigned, searches for Places to Swim are up 28% and event searches are up 23%. This is a direct marketing benefit to our clubs and sanctioned events.

Marketing platforms such as our social media programs, our daily broadcasts from Nationals, and the 30 *STREAMLINES* e-newsletters we publish, give us a voice to tell club and member stories. By telling your stories, we dispel the myth that only competitive adults can swim Masters and we invite others to come be part of your local programs. We're pleased to share our latest USMS brand video.

The success of our marketing programs has encouraged our sponsors to promote USMS. Household names such as Marriott and Garmin have joined us in the past few years. And just this week, we announced a new 4-year sponsorship with Nationwide Insurance. These new sponsor partners not only add cachet to USMS, they include us in their marketing programs, which expands our communication beyond our membership.

Sports marketing experts will tell you need one of two things to get sponsorship from corporate America; television exposure or the magic number of 100,000 members, so it's a

testimony that we've been able to demonstrate the value and have success signing sponsorships with companies of this status.

Our national championships are another area we have invested marketing resources and brought visibility to USMS. But let's also be honest with ourselves about the expectations of some of our national championships. When they're not living up to our excellence standard, the status quo is no longer acceptable. A new definition of success needs to be put in place so that these USMS-championships support and reflect our values.

Our grassroots marketing efforts have become very popular and appreciated by clubs, workout groups, and USMS events, all of which get access to banners, swim caps, stickers, and sponsor products, basically for free, so that they can create a better experience for members while marketing themselves.

And despite our progress with marketing, some still call Masters Swimming the best-kept secret? Is that how we want to be viewed? The best kept secret? Our strategic plan, after all, declares "We want to be the premier resource for adult aquatic fitness and will make fitness through swimming available for as many adults as possible." So how do we shed this best-kept secret label?

Let me give you a few examples. Triathlons have become part of our culture. Although we're seeing more triathletes find our local programs, by and large, USMS has little marketing visibility with the triathlon community.

College club swimming is growing in popularity, too. We've dipped our toe into this water by being onsite at their championships the past few years and know we can do more in marketing to the future of USMS.

Public relations is an area in which we are reactive, rather than proactive, waiting on others in the media to tell our story. It's to our benefit to allocate marketing resources in new spaces that will drive USMS awareness and leads for our programs.

There is a big picture and far reaching marketing program shaping up that is modeled after the Got Milk campaign. "Swim Today...Live Tomorrow" is an aquatics industry initiative that will create a platform to promote swimming across the country and drive people to our local programs. Our friends at Speedo, TYR, USA Swimming, and others have signed on. USMS has been sought out to represent the adult voice in the campaign and we're excited to have a seat at the table.

Another area we have dedicated resources has been the establishment of our Swimming Saves Lives Foundation. In 2012, Swimming Saves Lives provided grants to five programs that taught nearly 200 adults to swim. In 2013, we'll provide support, from member contributions, to local programs that will benefit more than three thousand adults with introductory and learn-to-swim opportunities. The Centers for Disease Control estimates 37% of adults can't swim the length of a pool. That is 25 yards—one end of the pool to the other. They can't make it.

Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death in our country. And it's preventable! No organization is better positioned or capable than USMS of being the leading water safety advocate for adults. And when adults are water safe, they're more likely to ensure that their children are, thus reducing preventable drowning generation by generation. Swimming saves lives not only by helping to prevent drowning, but also by encouraging an active, healthy lifestyle using swimming as exercise, and exercise as medicine.

We stand here today, in the infancy of our Foundation, with approximately thirty Swimming Saves Lives local partners who are providing introductory opportunities for adults in their communities. We know many of you have an adult learn-to-swim program as well. You are positively contributing to your communities and to the greater good. We want you to partner with the Swimming Saves Lives Foundation. Can you envision a day when we celebrate because we have just registered our 500th Swimming Saves Lives partner? How about our 1,000th partner? Is it too farfetched to think we can have 2,500 Swimming Saves Lives Foundation partners? When we dare to dream big, we will achieve big.

While the intent of the dues increase program was so we could improve service, provide new services, and market USMS, it helped us in another way. What many of you may not know is that because of the resources from the dues increase, we were able to weather a bad storm and continue to provide insurance to our members when a dramatic increase threatened benefits. The proverbial rainy day happened. Insurance costs now consume a year of the dues increase. In adversity though, there is often a silver lining. This issue has brought a spot light to our overall risk management practices and how we can improve them to provide better service.

When the dues increase was implemented in 2009, there were guarantees that USMS would lose members. In fact, the opposite has happened; membership is up 18%, our retention has improved nearly 10%, and the number of clubs has grown 17%. Our Board of Directors, led by President Nadine Day, KNOWS that our strategic plan is our road map—our guide for where

we invest our time, treasure, and talent. What I sincerely hope is that we recognize that our investment has provided benefit to the membership at large in some shape or fashion.

As I prepared for Convention, I found a quiet bench at our community center. There I sat, with the pool as the backdrop, reading some of the letters exchanged nearly four decades ago between Ransom Arthur, John Spannuth, June Krauser, and others. These letters detail the struggles and sacrifices our pioneers endured so that we could be here today. It reminds me that we carry an awesome responsibility to continue spreading the word and to continue providing opportunities for adults to swim.

May this be a great Convention, because we stay true to that commitment and carry forward their vision and encourage more adults to swim.

Thank you.