

CEO Address to the HOD

Good morning. It is great to be here. When I started in late March it seemed as if there was plenty of time to plan for my first Convention. Clearly I am having fun as 6 months have flown by and here we are, with a number of exciting decisions to be made over the next few days, an updated strategic plan, that we'll present this evening, and a few new initiatives developed out of the strategic planning process.

This week is about our collective team effort to support our membership and continue to improve the organization for the future. But before we look towards the future, and since this is my first address to the House of Delegates I thought you may be interested in some background about me that doesn't come through a resume or bio. My first foray into competitive swimming was, believe it or not, an open water swim at the age of 5. I participated in a summer camp in Southern California that hosted paddle boarding, swimming, diving and rowing competitions in Newport Beach for kids aged 4-16. Open Water may be a bit exaggerated as we dove off a dock into the Harbor and the 4-6 age group swam what amounted to about 12 yards. This is likely where my desire to be a sprinter started.

That year I didn't finish first once and I told my parents I wanted to swim more regularly because I wanted to beat a kid named Richie Nichols, so I joined a summer league swim team. The extra practice

worked as I beat Richie the following year but when we aged up Richie's older brother, Matt, who swam year round with the local USA Swimming Club beat me. Apparently I didn't like losing and decided I wanted to swim year round. I didn't lose many races at camp the next 6 years and my parents found a great way to wear me out throughout my childhood.

When I was 8 my family moved to Irvine and I joined the Novaquatics where I swam through high school. Even while playing basketball, soccer, and water polo (and the piano), swimming was the one constant and landed me at the University of Michigan as a non-scholarship athlete.

Michigan has a storied swimming history and it was an honor to be part of a team with numerous Olympians but in case you are wondering how fast I was: I never won another swimming race from that point on. For anyone interested in my times or those of my Michigan teammates, I'll refer you to Skip Thompson who knows them better than I do. I left swimming after my sophomore year and spent a year in Australia studying abroad, which included a lot of surfing, and after graduating from Michigan moved back to Southern California to be near the ocean again.

While considering the opportunity to join U.S. Masters Swimming and proceeding through the interview process I spent time thinking about how I became a candidate for this role. My sports marketing and non-profit background aligned well with the job description but I realized those career experiences resulted from skills I learned swimming as a kid. From the teamwork to the work ethic and ability to follow a plan and stay focused on a long term goal, my age group and college swimming experiences had set me up for success and so, I find myself back in the swimming world.

When Patty offered me the position my first thought was 'I need to go do some lap swimming to get in shape' so I don't embarrass myself. In fact, Patty laughed and explained I'd be fine just showing up. Although I did get in one swim of about 800 yards before jumping into my first Masters workout, Patty's advice was correct and I survived a pretty competitive group in Sarasota. (To be transparent, that first workout was a taper for Y Nationals, so I was feeling pretty good about my 1500 yards with 25s off the blocks at the end.)

In an effort to get up to speed with USMS quickly, I began having as many conversations as possible with volunteers and staff. During those discussions I learned that my 20-year hiatus was pretty typical as was my concern about jumping back into the pool. The fact that these were

not unique experiences launched what were thousands of questions for the staff on how to turn those challenges into opportunities and into new Masters members.

Those conversations along with the strategic planning process also had 2 frequently reoccurring themes. First, USMS has an amazing support structure with volunteers and a National Office team that, across the board, are passionate about the sport and the success of the organization. (It may simply be my prior experiences but that passion and motivation is not always replicated in other organizations. I believe we are relatively unique from that standpoint.) Second there are hundreds of great ideas out there to improve our members experience, attract new swimmers to the organization, simplify administrative processes and develop innovative programs, events and benefits to further our mission of promoting health, wellness, fitness and competition through swimming.

So the challenge becomes where to start? How should ideas be prioritized? How many can be successfully tackled at one time? Which opportunities will have the greatest impact? What targets should we set for ourselves and over what time frame? How do we communicate the details throughout the organization?

The strategic plan that has been revised over the last six months will guide us in answering those questions. The budget that has been proposed outlines adjustments and new initiatives to begin following that guidance.

To support the vision of becoming the premier resource for adult aquatic fitness in the United States and making fitness through swimming available for as many adults as possible, strategies have been developed that address membership value, clarity of the collective USMS brands, innovation for the future and strengthening both external and internal partnerships.

I have used the term strategic plan so many times since moving to Sarasota, my wife and kids now call it 'strategery'. So let's dispense with the 'strategery' for a minute and try something fun.

We are going to test an initiative right now that was developed in the last six months and has roots in all of the themes I just mentioned. You are all aware of the Swimming Saves Lives Foundation and its efforts to provide grants to programs that teach adults to swim. We have had continued requests from members interested in raising funds for the Foundation, through their own donations, through event fundraising and through crowdfunding. These requests are an indication of the passion our members and volunteers have for the organization and its

efforts. We have provided a portal to donate through registration and on the website but have not fully embraced technology that allows us spread the word virally by asking friends, family, and social networks to support our efforts. An example is the Lake Erie Relay Swim. This group of six OHIO Masters swimmers decided they wanted to swim from Canada to Ohio across Lake Erie. They also set out to raise awareness and fundraise for the Swimming Saves Lives Foundation as part of their swim. The group built a social media, e-mail and mail campaign to market the effort. Not only did they successfully swim across the border they raised over \$8500. 6 Masters Swimmers - \$8500.

There are some very deserving grant applicants that will not be awarded a grant this year because the funds are not available. We believe that we can accomplish 3 goals by improving our grassroots fundraising efforts, messaging and functionality. First we can start to utilize a small percentage of funds raised to cover Foundation and the April is Adult Learn to Swim Month expenses. Second we can build a larger pool of funds to provide more grants and third we can better engage our members and their social networks to spread the word about our efforts – not just Adult-Learn-to-Swim initiatives but also the U.S. Masters Swimming mission, vision and programs.

So here is the plan: We received a donation through our sponsor Swim Outlet that allowed us to provide goggles to about 25% the grant program participants last year. We expect to have a similar agreement with them this coming year. But we want to provide every participant a set of goggles. Each set of goggles costs approximately \$5 so we estimate with an additional \$3500 we can make that happen.

You are our test case for the mobile and online fundraising platform we are planning to utilize to scale up our efforts moving forward. You will all receive an e-mail shortly that will allow you to donate and/or share the initiative with your social networks or via e-mail. If everyone in this room donates \$5 and has 1 friend who donates \$5 we will very nearly reach our goal. If we exceed the goal the funds will be available for next year's grant applicants or other program expenses. I am skipping my Starbucks tomorrow and donating right now.

This is our first initiative with the platform so we hope to learn from it and more importantly hope we can reach our goal. Check your e-mails, make a donation, post to social media and forward via e-mail. And give a National Office Team member any feedback on the process.

I am grateful for the opportunity to return to the swimming world after a winding career path through the business side of two baseball teams in San Diego and Kansas City, and the Orange Bowl Committee in South

Florida. I see a lot of similarities in the relationship between the National and Local organizational structures of Major League Baseball, College Football and our structure. The strong partnership between the various entities produces an organization that is more than the sum of the parts and provides the best experience for the end user, in our case our members. As we plan for the future this week, keep in mind the former age-group, high school or college swimmer who loved the health, fitness and social benefits of swimming but like all of us may have family and career demands, may have gained a few pounds sitting behind a desk and is a bit intimidated by the term Masters and the perception of elite Masters Swimmers. Let's consider ideas that make it easy for this former swimmer to learn about our programs, join our ranks, lose a couple pounds, participate in our events, engage with our Learn-to-Swim initiatives, volunteer on a pool deck or at the LMSC level, and maybe join us at this Convention in the future.

I want to thank Patty, the Board and the CEO search task force for the opportunity and thank the National Office Team for their efforts throughout the last six months. I look forward to working with all of you as we guide U.S. Masters Swimming into the future.