

North Carolina Recipient of the Kerry O'Brien Coaching Award

By Hans van Meeteren

The U.S. Masters Swimming Coaches Committee initiated a new award in 2008 with the goal of recognizing USMS registered coaches who are building our membership in communities throughout our country. Originally named the Grass Roots Coaching Award, it has been renamed to honor Coach Kerry O'Brien of Walnut Creek Masters, who embodies the passion, dedication, and heart that these coaches bring to the pool deck. It is with the efforts of individuals like these that U.S. Masters Swimming will most certainly move to a greater level. Kerry was the USMS Coach of the Year in 1987.



He is a mentor to swimmers and other coaches far and wide. By providing this award USMS recognizes the importance of coaches to master swimming. Coaches are the glue that keep workout groups together by providing a most important member service whatever an individual swimmer's motivation. Every year USMS awards coaches that excel in providing this member service.

Long term masters swim coach **Patty Waldron** is a recipient of this year's Kerry O'Brien award. Below are some excerpts from Patty's nomination and the letter that Kerry wrote to Patty.

To do justice to Patty's long term accomplishments I have quoted in this nomination people who have worked closely with her and have known her much longer than I have.

In March 2012, longtime SwimMAC Carolina Coach Patty Waldron announced her retirement from coaching at the club, after spending 29 years with the program. Current CEO/Director of Coaching David Marsh said "Patty Waldron is a cornerstone to the development and success of SwimMAC Carolina. As a tough-training swimmer, a coach who has worked with every level of the program, created the state's strongest masters swimming program, Patty's impact has been felt by anyone and everyone that has been associated with the program over the last 29 years."

Before being hired in 1983 by then Head Coach Jeff Gaeckle, Waldron swam with the club while home on break from the University of North Carolina. During the summer month Patty began her coaching career at Sardis Swim and Racket Club. Upon graduating from UNC Chapel Hill with a BA in Education (Health and Physical Education K-12) Patty accepted Gaeckle's offer in March of '83 and figured she would stick around for three-four years

before moving on to teach in a school system. It didn't happen to go that way. "I hired Patty Huey (maiden name) for her incredible amount of team spirit," said Gaeckle.

Patty has always been a very versatile coach. She started as a junior coach, she also was the office assistant, swim school director and swim school teacher many times. Waldron also served as the facility manager at three different SwimMAC pools. She has coached in every division of the four current divisions, been the head age-group coach and of course, breathed new life into the SwimMAC Masters' program. During her coaching career, Waldron has not only coached and developed more than 700 college swimmers, but she also has worked with 20 athletes that have gone onto Olympic trials and two Olympic gold-medalist Ricky Berens, a former South Mecklenburg star and 2008 Olympian. From swimming with the masters group at the old Central YMCA, Waldron has developed the masters program into one of the toughest in the state. She still holds North Carolina state records, is a former Masters National Record holder in the 25-29 200 yard Butterfly and was ranked number one in the nation in the 100 yard Butterfly 30-34 Masters.

From Pat Hogan, Club Development Managing Director at USA Swimming, Former Head Coach for SwimMAC Carolina: "Patty is an amazing human being. The best way to describe her is that she is genuine, kind, selfless, and compassionate ... the ultimate giver. I am not sure that I have met anyone in my life who gives more of herself to others on a day-to-day basis than Patty Waldron. The SwimMAC organization is incredibly blessed to have benefitted from her talents and services all these years. Thank you, Patty.

After about a year into retirement from Patty Waldron started to miss the coaching of masters. In March 2013 she started coaching a small group of masters' swimmers as part of the Mecklenburg Swim Association in Charlotte. She build this masters group from almost nothing to a group of 80 swimmers as of June 2014, making it the second largest workout group in Charlotte. This is more remarkable considering that training takes place in a 6-lane 25 Yard pool.

During her hiatus from masters' coaching Patty became the swimming coach for the Charlotte Latin School. In 2014 Patty Waldron, named Charlotte Observer swimming coach of the year, led the boys team to its second straight NCISAA 3A (highest division of the NC Independent School Athletic Association) state title. The girls' team placed second.

Patty is an ASCA certified level 2 Masters Coach, level 3 Age Group Coach and Level 4 Senior Coach. She has been an instructor for Masters/ASCA Level 1 and 2 courses.

Patty is a well known name in the triathletes' community. Being an accomplished triathlete herself, she has integrated open water and other swimming elements in her master training program that are of special value to triathletes. One of the triathletes' web sites shows: "The Mecklenburg Swim Association is an adult aquatic training group that welcomes all ability levels to their Blakeney location. Adult fitness swimmers, competitive pool swimmers and triathletes train together in a team environment. But most importantly, the workouts are lead by Patty Waldron, a professional coach who has 34 years of coaching experience, ranging from bubble blowers through professional. Patty is the best coach in town for adult-onset-swimmers looking to learn to swim and develop proper technique work."

Patty is one of the few NC masters coaches who have regularly contributed to the NC e-news letter Across the Lanes. She also has contributed to SWIMMER Magazine. Her choice of articles shows her diversity as a coach: Tapering....A State of Mind, Body, and Heart, Chesapeake Bay Swim, USMS Swimfest , The Coaches' Corner Open Water....Catch the Wave, "From The Center Lanes: John Kortheuer", On Deck With ... Patty Waldron. The article about Jon Kortheuer shows her great respect for master swimmers.

In this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwgi-T7LF4g> from the US Masters YouTube channel coach Patty Waldron talks about her club and the future of her program. This video shows it all!

Below is the letter that Kerry O'Brien wrote to Patty:

Dear Patty,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on receiving the Kerry O'Brien Coaching Award. As nice as it is to receive some token of recognition, the real reward comes in the knowledge of how your club and athletes value the positive effect you are making in their lives. Knowing you as long as I have and the great work you have done with SwimMAC, it is a thrill for me to be able to write this letter.

"Club Development" is an integral piece of the vision that the executive director and USMS see for the continued growth of our organization. Through your tenure you have greased a lot of wheels in many different aspects of the swimming business to ensure that the high expectations associated with SwimMAC were met without exception. The journey traveled through the coaching ranks have left you with an appreciation for athletes of all levels, and developed the skills to relate, educate, and inspire each. It is because of coaches like you that Masters Swimming has been able to bridge into the triathlon communities so successfully, and has proven to be a solid marriage for both organizations. I have been grateful for the opportunities I have had to share a pool deck with you, see you work, and glean from your experience and witness the passion you have for our profession.

A step away provided the space necessary to bring clarity back in regards to "what we love about what we do!" Again, you have been able to put on display all the needed talents and drive that make you such a value to any swimming community, and now the Mecklenburg Swim Association is the beneficiary. They know that your teaching style and practice design, wrapped in a caring spirit, is your solemn commitment to their thriving as members.

On behalf of the Coaches Committee of USMS, I want to thank you for your devotion to our sport, and the example you have set in the benefits of career coaching. Award presentations will be done at the USAS Convention in September and mailed to those not in attendance.

Sincerely,

Kerry O'Brien
Walnut Creek Masters