

Meet NC Swimmer Jonathan Washburn

By John Blank

This is the first in an occasional series of profiles of NC Masters athletes. Jonathan Washburn of Seahawk Masters Swimming is an accomplished and many-faceted community leader. Based in Wilmington, he champions access to competitive and fitness swimming in NC's Port City. Washburn graduated with honors from Davidson College, where he won the prestigious Tommy Peters award as the school's outstanding athlete. He then earned both a JD and MBA at UNC-Chapel Hill.

After returning to Wilmington, he began his family and started to specialize in real estate law and subsequently, commercial real estate development. With such an impressive resume, it would seem that he had little time for any relationships outside of work and family. Yet as he now openly reports, he also had a secret: his relationship with alcohol. Thankfully, through his family's caring support, he now proudly counts over 11 years of sobriety. Jonathan took his recovery so seriously that he founded a shelter home for those in need, where he continues to lead counseling sessions every day of the week. He shares his testimony freely, hoping to help others. He also volunteers for the NC Bar Association's substance use recovery program and other organizations.



In this picture: Jonathan (the tall swimmer second from right) with his team mates at the 2012 Lake Lure National Open Water Championships.

He brings the same level of commitment and enthusiasm to his leadership role in Wilmington Masters Swimming. Most recently, he led the founding of a new entity, Seahawk Masters Swimming. Excerpts from Washburn's statement on the founding and purpose for Seahawk Masters Swimming follow:

"Simultaneously with growth of Wilmington's Masters' program, the varsity swim program at UNC Wilmington was on the chopping block. There were several reasons, but funding was a major issue. After months of media coverage, staff and administration meetings, petitions and public rally events, Chancellor Gary Miller announced that varsity swimming at UNCW would not be cut. The message was, however, to find a private way to fund scholarships. This led to the birth of "SEAHAWK SPLASH".

"I agreed in September 2013 to become Aquatics Director at the UNCW pool. My mission: UNCW Varsity swimming comes first. All other programs will be run to generate net profits for UNCW Swimming and Diving. The first program to kick off the effort was SEAHAWK MASTERS SWIMMING (aka "HAWK"). The beautiful facility with eight lanes, separate diving well, multiple clocks and electronic timing was made available. Working out pool schedules with UNCW varsity swimming and the local swim club, SEAHAWK MASTERS SWIMMING (aka "HAWK") now has six one-hour practices each week. (M-W-F at noon; T-Th at 7:30 am; Sunday at 1 pm). Michael Williams, former UNCW sprint swimmer champion and still record holder, as well as Assistant Coach for UNCW Swimming, is our on-deck coach".

The Masters' program, within just a few weeks, has enrolled nearly 40 dues-paying athletes, among them newly-minted FINA Masters world record holder Alicia Uhl. Washburn is quick to point out that the Seahawk Swimming program will soon include learn-to-swim programs, outreach and fundraising efforts, and possibly summer swim camps - but it's the Masters' program that leads the way. Again, his avowed goal is to support UNCW's Swimming and Diving teams. Simply put, he has creatively channeled a great deal of time, effort, and energy into his community, to UNCW, and to NC Masters Swimming. His example demonstrates, every day, that alcohol and water don't mix.