

Note From Team President Cathy Gainor

I am honored to take over the reins of the Montgomery Ancient Mariners from Dave Harmon, who did an incredible job for eight years keeping us moving forward through some difficult times, especially during the pandemic. I am particularly grateful that he didn't abandon the presidency while practices were shut down because of COVID. Since he entered his ANCM retirement in October, I have frequently sought his guidance — and will continue to do so. Thanks much, Dave!

First, the good news: As I'm sure everyone already knows, the Albatross Open is back after our COVID hiatus. Our annual swim meet will be held the afternoon of April 2 at KSAC. I know you have all read my emails, so I won't push too hard — but please enter the meet. It is a great bonding experience, and the meet gives you a goal to target for the next couple of weeks. If you don't want to do an individual event, maybe just try a relay instead. We will be putting together relays as the meet gets closer, and you can sign up as a relay-only swimmer. And relays are free(!) for Ancient Mariners. They are another great way to bond with your teammates as well as a way to meet other Ancient Mariners. Also, please don't think you're too slow to swim in a relay. That is not true. There is no "too slow" in masters swimming, and we enter these because we enjoy them, not to set any world records.

If you really don't want to swim, please consider volunteering to time. We need a bunch of timers, but you've seen those emails, too. Timing is a great way to be involved in a meet and see what it's all about if you are new to competitive swimming. Just make sure you dress for summer and wear sandals/flip flops. Your feet will get wet.

The Albatross Open, also, is the team's only fundraiser. Which brings me to ... the bad news. We currently have 170 Ancient Mariners registered with U.S. Masters Swimming this year. However, only 99 of us have paid the \$15 annual team dues. I realize that our registration process is a pain — signing up separately for practice, for USMS and paying your Ancient Mariner dues is not ideal. However, we have tried to make it as simple as possible, now that USMS no longer collects the club dues for us. Just follow the three easy steps on our [registration page \("Join Now"\)](#) on our website, www.ancientmariners.org. You can pay your dues through PayPal, or you can write a check payable to the Montgomery Ancient Mariners and give it to a coach during practice.

Those team dues are important. They pay for our parties and socials, our Ancient Mariner team caps, whiteboards for the coaches, and elays for team members at other meets, among other things. In the event that the Albatross Open loses money, which does happen occasionally, the dues help cover the costs of running the meet — a very popular meet that draws swimmers from all over the country. So please pay the dues. In short, they are critical to the long-term survival of the team.

In very good news, our website committee — Dottie Buchhagen, Todd Moniot, Hannah Rubin and Mia Garcia-Cortez — has been working hard the last several months on a new and improved website.

And last, two congratulations are in order. First, congrats again to head coach Clay Britt for his induction into the Masters International Swimming Hall of Fame. It's much deserved! Also, congrats to ANCM Bob Benson, who came in third in the 85-90 age group in the one-hour virtual swim this year. Bob, who turns 87 this year, swam 2,605 yards in an hour. A longtime swimmer at MLK, Bob inspires me every day and should be an inspiration to us all!

The Silvery (Icy) Lining of the Pandemic by Kara Permisohn



Never in a million years did I imagine that swimming outdoors year-round in open water could be enjoyable! Many people talk about the silver linings of the pandemic. For me it has been finding a love of swimming in open water. It seems crazy, but yes even through the winter.

While I miss seeing all of my Ancient Mariners team friends dearly, I can't say I miss the tightness in my lungs, itchy skin, brittle hair or that black line on the bottom of the pool. I have dealt with exercise-induced asthma most of my life. It typically only affected me when I pushed too hard in the pool or humid weather. The more that I have swum outdoors in fresh (brackish) water I'm beginning to wonder if my breathing issues were more related to air quality or a sensitivity to the chlorine. It's not as if I'm new to open water. Over the past 15 years I have practiced in open water regularly on the weekends. However, when the pandemic hit in 2020 and everything shut down, I found myself without anywhere to swim.

My regular weekend group, the Arundel Breakfast Club (ABC), was on average an older group and they decided to cancel workouts for fear of COVID-19 exposure. That led me to a new "unofficial" group of motley swimmers trying to keep going in the water no matter what. The host lives in Annapolis across the street from his community dock on Duvall Creek which feeds to the South River. At the time he was barely an acquaintance whom I had met at the Albatross Open because he coached and swam with the District of Columbia Aquatics Club (DCAC) masters team. In early May 2020, I saw a post on Facebook of them swimming in the river. I jokingly commented how I wish I had somewhere like that to go and before I knew it, I was invited to join them!

Who knew that when I showed up for that first practice with virtually all strangers that I'd be swimming with them for the next two years? The commute is about 50 minutes each way, but the adventure is valuable every time. I went from my busy career in marketing, networking, and lots of driving to quarantining. As a single person, working from home, and being alone all the-time, I was extremely

isolated. My excursions to Annapolis a few days a week became my one reason to leave the house and my saving grace to keep my sanity.

Eventually pools opened up, but I could never seem to get a time slot that worked with my schedule. I found myself opting to continue in the river more and more. In addition to the benefits of getting my swims in, it became a safe, outdoor space for a little socialization. Swimmers of all abilities from fitness to world record caliber had come together to share their love of the sport. We learned to push each other without the competition that often comes with lane mates at pools. A core group continued through the summer of 2020 and by the end of September, we started sporting wetsuits. As it got cooler we thought let's get to mid-October. That became let's go until Halloween, then Thanksgiving. Around this time a mutual ABC friend heard about our swims and introduced a whole new group of experienced marathon swimmers to us. This opened a door for some wild new experiences!

Many of the marathoners were also experienced cold water and ice swimmers. This seemed insane to subject ourselves to the extreme conditions. Slowly as we acclimated Thanksgiving led to Christmas, New Years and we kept going. The majority of the marathoners swim without wetsuits called "skins" all year round. They need to stay acclimated to the cold so that when the attempt feats such as the English Channel they can handle the body chilling waters that are usually in the 50s (60s if they're lucky.) I was not this brave! The difference was as temps dropped, they were entering the water for a "polar plunge" or lasting maybe as long as 5, 8, 12 or 15 minutes. I found that with the wetsuit which eventually included a neoprene cap, gloves, and booties I could last 45 minutes to one hour. The gear doesn't keep you warm but helps the skin to tolerate the cold. In that time, I was still swimming about 3,200 meters and getting a decent workout. I have also discovered that I'm a pretty good backstroke swimmer because sometimes putting my face in gives me brain freeze.

I realize at this point some of you are saying "that's dangerous!" To that I say yes it has potential, but we heed all caution to be as safe as possible. The International Ice Swimming Association (IISA) offers a comprehensive set of safety guidelines and excellent advice on how to acclimate. An ice swim workout is just as much for the mind as it is the body! Because our system is battling with its fight or flight mechanisms all senses become heightened. I have newfound strength, feeling of control, confidence, and calm thanks to these experiences. In one word it's meditative. Ice swimming has been scientifically proven to offer benefits for issues like inflammation and challenging the brain similar to doing puzzles for the prevention of illnesses such as dementia and Alzheimer's.

By no means am I suggesting that anyone just go dive into cold water swimming. It's been a very slow process of constant learning. Every swim is different due to temperature, weather elements like wind, snow, sunshine, clouds, and more. If you're ever interested, I am more than happy to chat and it's always an open invitation to come observe or participate with this group. If nothing else come kayak and be our safety eyes above the water. Happy swimming everyone!

I Left My Fast in 2020

by Kristen Koehler

My first swim of 2022, I jumped in the pool and started thinking about how it has almost been two years since the pandemic altered our lives. It seems like yesterday that I was at a Sunday morning swim practice in March 2020 talking with my teammates about how long we think things will stay shut down....my guess was 2 to 3 weeks (ha!). Most people firmly believed we would be back in the pool by June, especially since we swam outdoors in the summer months.

Little did we know it would be a long 15 months before our team would be back up and swimming again. Those 15 months were the longest I have ever gone without swimming since age four. At first it was glorious! I didn't reek of chlorine. My hair wasn't dry and brittle. My sleep schedule was improving. But as the months dragged on, I started to miss swimming. I attempted to get in and swim on my own in January 2021 when the pools started opening again, but I could never get an open slot on the registration site. Frustrated, I gave up the hope of getting back into it.

Even though I was finding other forms of exercise my clothes started getting tight, my stress level was high, and my energy was low. I started to realize how important swimming was in my life. Swimming was life. It kept me fit, energized and less stressed.

When the announcement came that our masters team could start practices again in June 2021, I breathed a sigh of relief. My life could finally return to "normal." I was so worried that first day of practice though. Not a single hair on my head had touched a pool for 15 months. Most of my teammates had found ways to keep swimming during the hiatus. I purposely arrived an hour into the two-hour practice, knowing I would never make a two-hour practice.

From the moment I jumped into the water, I felt like I was complete again. I made it the entire hour and kept up with everyone in my lane. I didn't die! And that feeling! That glorious feeling you get when you accomplish a great workout. I slowly started to get back into my routine. My body had missed swimming so much (my hair on the other hand had not). The stress of the last 15 months started to melt away as I powered through each lap.

My clothes started fitting again - a good thing since I had to start going back into the office (I do miss my stretchy leggings though). It did take two months to build up any real endurance. Soon after I felt like I was getting stronger, my coach decided to give us a sprint set. He stood at the front of the lane timing us. After two very slow "sprints" he asked me how I was feeling. I motioned for him to lean down so he could hear me, and I said, "I left my fast in 2020." He chuckled and replied, "I think we all did."

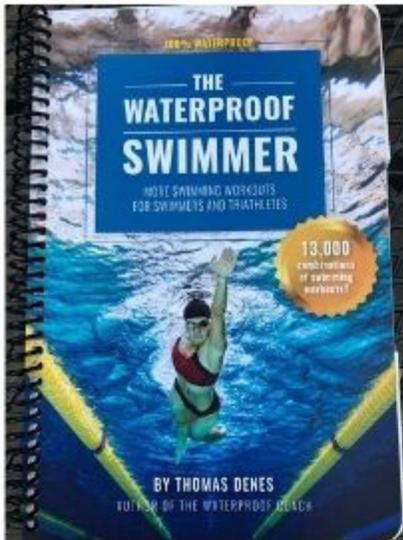
Now that I have been swimming for a while I wonder if I will ever get back to my 2020 shape. I don't stress about it though, because the sheer joy of being able to swim on the Ancient Mariners masters team again is all I really care about.



Marci Goldberg was awarded the 2021 Girls on the Run of Montgomery County Volunteer of the Year at their 5k race in November 2021.



She has been a volunteer coach for the team at Bradley Hills Elementary School since 2016. This spring is her 13th season volunteering with Girls on the Run.



Can't attend an Ancient Mariners practice during the week? Looking for workouts when swimming on your own? Coach Tom Denes has written The Waterproof Swimmer, which includes over 40 pages of workouts that that you can mix and match.

To order a book, talk to Tom at practice or email him at waterproofcoach@gmail.com.



Congratulations to the following Ancient Mariners swimmers who had USMS Top 10 times in short course meters events in 2021!

Clay Britt
Men's 60-64
50 and 100 backstroke

Cathy Gainor
Women's 50-54
200 IM

Neil Gillen
Men's 80-84
100 backstroke