

# Otters Handbook

Everything you ever wanted to know about  
becoming a better swimmer ...  
the Ypsilanti Otters way!



A handbook for new and returning Otter families.  
Fall, 2005

# Introduction to YOSC

The Ypsilanti Otters Swim Club, often known as YOSC or simply Otters, is a not-for-profit swimming organization founded in 1960 to teach, train, and motivate swimmers at all skill levels. **We believe that all young people should have access to swimming opportunities that reflect their level of interest.** YOSC strives for its swimmers to reach their full potential not only by teaching the skills specific to swimming, but also through reinforcing strong values that apply to all facets of life. Members of our team learn respect, goal-setting, team-building, dedication, and sportsmanship. Our swimmers are proud of themselves and their team. They develop strong friendships and have fun as they build self-confidence and character in an atmosphere of encouragement and instruction. YOSC operates under the sponsorship of the Ypsilanti Public Schools Community Education Department. To the extent possible, YOSC financially supports those families who would otherwise be unable to participate.

YOSC is involved with two swim organizations, **SMSL (Southern Michigan Swim League)** and USA Swimming. SMSL is comprised of member teams from various communities in our area, including Chelsea, Saline, Pinckney, South Lyon, and others. The League has recently been divided along lines of team size, placing Otters in the same division as other large area teams, including Hartland, Howell, Saline, Dexter, and others. Meets are held on weekday evenings, with warm-ups starting at 5:15 pm, competition starting at 6 pm, and ending by 8:30 pm. Five dual meets are held per season, followed by a championship meet in which all League teams participate. Championship meets are held in December and March. Participation in meets is encouraged but not mandatory (participation in championships requires attending at least one dual meet). YOSC won the SMSL championships most recently in 2004.

**USA Swimming** is a national swimming organization that requires a separate enrollment from the Otter enrollment (enrollment in SMSL is automatic). Membership in USA Swimming offers the competitive swimmer the opportunity to participate in weekly meets at the local, state, regional, and national levels, depending on the accomplishment of the individual swimmer. Competition is organized by age and skill level, so both developing and highly skilled swimmers have the opportunity to compete at an appropriate level and win ribbons and medals. In the summer 2005 long-course season, twenty Otters qualified for state-level competition, and six for zone-level competition.

Membership in Otters is nearly 200 swimmers, divided by interest and ability level into the Learn-to-Swim ("Pups" and Jr. Otters), Development, and Competitive programs. Approximately half of Otters live in Ypsilanti; the remainder live in surrounding communities. Practices are held at Estabrook Elementary, Ypsilanti High School, and Eastern Michigan University pools, all located in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The Otters is a parent-run organization, which keeps costs down and keeps the organization responsive to the membership. All board members and coaches are available for comments, questions, and complaints via the club website, [www.ypsi-otters.org](http://www.ypsi-otters.org), or through use of the on-deck mailboxes at each of the practice pools. **Parent involvement is essential to the continued success of this club.**

# Coaching Staff

## **Kelton Graham, Head Coach**

Kelton is a native Detroiter and a graduate of Eastern Michigan University. He broke the city record in the breaststroke while in high school, and swam competitively throughout college, making the M.A.C. Championship squad each year. Kelton has been with the Otters since 2002, as head coach since fall, 2004. Kelton infects Otters swimmers with his enthusiasm and winning spirit. Kelton says, "Swimming is a sport that will teach you everything about life."

## **Bonnie Cervantes, Head Development Coach**

Bonnie grew up in Wyandotte, and first coached as a high schooler working with middle-school swimmers. Bonnie has coached Otters since 1993, working with every level of swimmer from Learn-to-Swim to Competitive. She is currently responsible for Pups and Development Otters, where her warm smile and gentle encouragement make her an ideal coach for younger swimmers.

## **Pat Wickering**

Pat attended Ypsilanti High School, and is in his senior year at EMU, earning a teaching degree in Phys. Ed. This is Pat's second year with the Otters, and this fall he will be working primarily with Kelton at the EMU pool. Pat's quiet manner disguises a wry sense of humor and an ability to inject fun into even the most intense workouts. Pat's philosophy is "Work hard but have fun at the same time."

## **Heather Karjalah**

Heather is a former Otter who is currently a senior at U-M. She has coached water polo, synchronized swimming, and competitive swimming since graduating from high school. Heather inspires great loyalty in those who swim for her because "she is so nice, and she makes workouts fun," in the words of one devotee. Fall 2005 is Heather's first season coaching Otters. She will be found primarily at the Ypsi High pool, working with Jr. Otters and Development swimmers.

## **Mike Zang**

Mike is another former Otter who returns to the pool as a coach for the first time this fall. Mike's career as a swimmer was marked by numerous placements in MTSL and USS State championships, as well as qualifying for the Division One state meets from his sophomore through senior years. He was co-captain of both the swim and water polo teams at Pioneer during his senior year. Mike is a distance swimmer whose favorite events include the 200, 500, 1000 and 1650 meter freestyle. He is currently enrolled at Eastern Michigan University in the art and physical education programs.

## **The 2005-2006 Otter Board**

Scott Elliot, Mary Gillis, Kelton Graham, Doug Hennigar, Kristie Kramer (treasurer), Matt Naud (president), Mary Palmerton, and Cathy Thorburn

# Learn-to-Swim Program

## Pups

**Ages:** Potty-trained to about 6 yo.

**Description:** Young swimmers learn to put their faces in the water and to use their arms and legs effectively to produce swim strokes.

**Location:** Estabrook Elementary School, 1555 W. Cross St, Ypsilanti

**Practices:** Two 45-minute practices are available weekly.

**Coaches:** Chris and Samir. Ratio is 10 swimmers/2 coaches

**Goals:** To learn to swim independently for short periods of time.

**Equipment Needs:** Swim suit and towel, goggles (to protect eyes from highly chlorinated pool water)

### Tips:

1. Each class begins with “free time,” a warm-up with games that builds confidence and comfort in the water, an important goal at this level. A 20-25 minute lesson is followed by more water games at the end. We have found that this structure makes for happy young swimmers who are learning even as they play about how to handle themselves and be safe in the water.
2. There will be weekly visits from the head development coach, Bonnie Cervantes, in order to ease the transition to swimming at Ypsi H.S.
3. Sessions will include “free days,” where play-to-learn is emphasized, and a “Bring a Friend” night, so little ones can show off their new skills to friends.
4. Parents are discouraged from remaining on the pool deck during lessons as deck space is severely limited.

## Jr. Otters

**Ages:** about 4 to 8 yo

**Description:** Beginning stroke work for swimmers who have advanced beyond Pups but are not yet able to swim the length of the Ypsi High pool.

**Location:** Shallow end of the Ypsilanti High School pool. Ypsi High is located at 2095 Packard Rd, at the corner of Hewitt and Packard (entrance to the pool is the driveway off of Hewitt).

**Practices:** Three one-hour practices are available for this group weekly.

**Coaches:** Bonnie Cervantes and Heather Karjalah. Ratio is 10 swimmers/1 coach

**Goals:** To swim the length of the pool with a consistent crawl stroke and sustainable breathing pattern. To be able to repeat this performance with intermittent rest.

**Equipment Needs:** Swimsuit, towel, and goggles.

**Meets:** Swimmers at this level may compete in dual meets and championships if interested, and with coach approval.

### Tips:

1. The transition to the pool at Ypsi High means cooler water temperatures than are found at Estabrook. In some cases, a wet suit may be desired.
2. Transition to the 25-yard pool length (where the Development-level swimmers practice) is encouraged by the end of each session.

# Development Program

**Ages:** about 5 to 12 yo

**Description:** For swimmers who can swim 25 yards, the length of the Ypsi High School pool, with repetition. Emphasis in practice is on all four competitive strokes and associated drills are introduced. Swimmers who are interested in competition start at this level.

**Location:** The Ypsilanti High School pool. Ypsi High is located at 2095 Packard Rd, at the corner of Hewitt and Packard (entrance to the pool is the driveway off of Hewitt).

**Practices:** Four one-hour practices are available per week; attendance at three is recommended.

**Coaches:** Heather Karjalah, Bonnie Cervantes, Mike Zang.

**Goals:** To swim all four competitive strokes legally and proficiently, and demonstrate some level of comfort and expertise with racing starts and turns.

**Equipment Needs:** Suit, towel, cap and goggles. Consider Otter gear, especially team parka or sweatshirt. A swim-sized backpack is helpful.

**Tips:**

1. Expect 10 minutes of stretching poolside before the start of practice.
2. Practices are geared toward producing proficient, competent swimmers in an atmosphere that is friendly and supportive.
3. Swimmers are encouraged to begin keeping track of their own swim times and continuous improvement.
4. Parents who wish to observe during practice must go to the observation deck above the pool (County Public Health rules) in order to reduce contaminating elements in the pool area.
5. While meet attendance is not required, it is encouraged for the simple reason that it facilitates the greatest improvement. A wise board member once said, "Kids who race develop *faster*."

# Competitive Program

**Ages:** about 9 to 14 yo (and older)

**Description:** For swimmers interested in acquiring mastery over all four competitive strokes through advanced drills, race strategy, interval-based aerobic training, and anaerobic training.

**Location:** Jones Natatorium, Eastern Michigan University (see map on back)

**Practices:** Six two-hour practices are offered per week, attendance at five-to-six is recommended, at least four expected.

**Coaches:** Kelton Graham, Pat Wickering

**Goals:** To acquire the technique, conditioning, commitment, and focus needed to be a competitive age-group, high school, or collegiate swimmer.

**Equipment Needs:** Suit, towel, cap and goggles, fins, weights, team gear, backpack.

**Meets:** Participation in dual meets and USA Swimming competitions is recommended.

**Tips:**

1. For insurance purposes, all Otters who practice at the EMU pool must be registered with USA Swimming.
2. Expect twenty-minutes of dry-land training before getting in the water.
3. Photo I.D. cards are issued to swimmers in this group. Swimmers are responsible for producing their cards at each practice in order to gain entrance into the EMU pool building (Olds Robb Recreation Center).
4. Competitive swimmers are expected to participate in SMSL championships and therefore must participate in at least one dual meet per season.

Map and directions (two sets) to drop-off areas for practices at EMU Jones Natatorium, located in the Olds Robb Recreation Center, next door to the Snow Health Center



# Otter Parents

## Tips

1. Movement of a swimmer from one skill level to the next (for example, from Jr. Otters to Development) is at the discretion of the coaching staff, in consultation with the individual swimmer and his/her parents. There is no added cost to parents with swim-group change after the start of the season.
2. Email is the primary form of communication about practice schedules and meets, meet results, and social activities. To begin receiving email announcements, send a message to [otters-announce-request@hvcn.org](mailto:otters-announce-request@hvcn.org) and type SUBSCRIBE in the body of the message (NOT in the subject). For more information, check the website, [www.ypsi-otters.org](http://www.ypsi-otters.org), where the season calendar and maps to meet locations may also be found.
3. Look for ribbons earned at dual meets and championships in the on-deck mailboxes (file folders) located at the pool where your swimmer practices. All families should regularly check both the website and the on-deck mailboxes for up-to-date information.
4. Season schedule
  - Fall: September - December (championships held in early Dec.)
  - Winter: January - April (championships held in March)
  - Spring: End of April - Early June
  - Long-Course: May - August
5. Swimming develops children's minds and bodies, as well as their spirits, in part through its emphasis on the "personal best." Parents are encouraged to help their children track their progress in comparison with *their own* previous performances.

## Responsibilities

1. Each Otter family is responsible for providing an adult worker to participate in two dual meets or social activities, and to take on one job. These commitments are made at the time of registration. Descriptions of volunteer jobs are available on the website, [www.ypsi-otters.org](http://www.ypsi-otters.org). On-the-job training is available for most positions, and is sufficient to perform adequately. When in doubt, offer to be a timer.
2. Questions or comments about the progress of your swimmer are welcome at the end of the day's session. Email is also a good way to contact the coaches.
3. Swimmers are expected to report for practice no more than five minutes before the scheduled start time. No swimmer is to be in attendance if unable to swim. An adult must accompany children who are not swimming. Swimmers must be picked up no later than fifteen minutes after the end of practice.