

Here in Marquette we have the privilege of living on the shores of the largest lake in the world and with that privilege comes some pretty amazing beach days, but certainly we don't get beach days all year round. Swimming in Lake Superior isn't for the faint of heart even the hottest summer day, so kids who want to swim year round can join a local swim team and do more than just splash around. The local YMCA offers the opportunity for local youth to join a team to work on their swimming skills and compete at swim meets. The swim program runs September through March out of the YMCA of Marquette County.

Shawn Robinson-Sobczak is the head coach of the Marquette Killer Whales swim team. Sobczak started competitive swimming at the young age of 11 and swam all throughout her college career. It is safe to say she knows her way around a pool. She has been coaching for a total of 19 years, only taking a short break after her daughter was born, but it was actually her daughter who inspired her to get her feet wet again.

"I kind of retired after I got pregnant. My last year [coaching] was being pregnant with my daughter, so then I took time off and I thought for sure I would want her to swim. I was a parent on the sidelines for the first time and I got kind of roped back into it and now I'm coaching again, so now my daughter is inspiring me to coach, and all her friends and family on the team," Sobczak said.

The Killer Whales have swimmers from the age of five up to the age of 18 on the team. One might think it would be difficult to coach kids with such a large age gap, but Sobczak says that each age group is her favorite.

"I like teaching the basics to the younger kids so I know that they have good habits all the way through, but maybe the middle groups I like the best because they are the most eager to learn new things," Sobczak explained.

The Killer Whales are divided by skill level with Future Stars, followed by Bronze, Silver and Gold. Sobczak teaches different skills at each level.

"We break it down...like after swim lessons is future stars and then we teach them the basics in that, starting from the basics of freestyle and backstroke; introduce them to breast stroke and butterfly and then we teach them the elements of a race starting with diving and how you finish, counting strokes," Sobczak explained.

All the practicing makes going to swim meets worthwhile. It is one Sobczak's favorite part of being a swim coach.

"I get to see the fruition of everyone's hard practice and the joy on everyone's face and happiness about their well-done swimming."

Sometimes kids are afraid to learn how to swim, but Sobczak wants parents to know it is a good idea to get kids involved in the sport.

“My advice is that swimming is a great life long sport and habit and since we grow up along the Great Lakes, it’s a good idea to learn early. We try to tell parents that kids should learn early and the more the confidence they get and more experienced at swim meets and stuff they tend to want to come back and continue. So I say stick with it. Give it a chance. Be patient with yourself. And stick with it.”

According to [swimmingworldmagazine.com](http://swimmingworldmagazine.com) there are several benefits for kids who join a competitive swim team. The list of advantages includes: swimming improves social well-being and helps kids become more confident. Swimming helps kids with goal orientation and competitive swimming helps kids become active adults, swimming may make kids smarter; helps them with memory function. Swimming can also slow down aging and is a lifelong sport. The magazine also points out that compared to other youth sports, swimming really requires minimal gear, which is a win-win for parents who might not have a lot of money to spend on expensive equipment.

Graham Tollefson, 11, has been swimming for seven years. He said he started swimming because one day his mom asked him if he wanted to join the team...so he did. He advanced through the levels and is currently swimming at the Advanced Bronze level. Tollefson says that his favorite stroke is the butterfly and that maybe when he is older he would like to be a swim coach. Tollefson doesn’t mind dedicating a lot of time to the sport and thinks the hardest part is learning new strokes and the easiest part of being on the team is probably doing the warm-up stretches. He competes in meets and knows how to deal with the stress of competition.

“Well, I guess in between our events there is normally a big gap, depending on how many you are doing and I’ll sit out here and think it over.”

Andrew King, 11, swims with the Killer Whales three days per week and just considers all the practice time a daily part of his schedule. He has been swimming with the team for four years. King’s favorite stroke to swim is the freestyle. King was inspired to join the swim team because the love of swimming runs in the family.

“My dad was a really good swimmer and set a bunch of records at Gwinn High School so that kind of encouraged me. I went to the high school and saw all of his old records still hanging,” King said.

It is rumored that putting on a swim cap can be difficult, but King, a pro, has an important tip.

“Get your hair wet and then get the cap wet.”

King also described jumping into the pool as “freezing,” but no worries, he has a tip to make it not as painful.

“You just have to get your head in and then it’s over with.”

If you feel like diving in headfirst and making a splash, contact the YMCA of Marquette County for more information about the Killer Whale swim team.

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