



Elena, Leora and Linda Salzhauer, two daughters and their Mom, swim in Dad's memory.

Photos by Janice Raber



Swim organizer Bob Coakley presides at the pre-swim briefing.



Jeanne II, right foreground, with a dozen visible swimmers.



Kathryn Taubert, named "Rookie of the Year," poses with her prize.

We are blessed on Long Island to be surrounded by water. Blessed to have a variety of enjoyable activities centered upon the sparkling liquid that provides so much pleasure, life-sustaining water.

To the people who participate in the annual Swim Across America Event, the words "life-sustaining water" hold a special meaning. It is in the hope of sustaining life, of finding a cure for the dread disease of cancer, that they take to the water each year. They swim in hope for life; theirs, their loved ones lost to cancer and those whose lives will someday be spared, maybe because of a vaccine or maybe a cure, found due to the funds they helped raise. They swim to make a statement about fighting cancer!

Swim Across America is a non-profit organization that raises money for the Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospital Cancer Research Lab through a variety of open water swims in Chicago, Boston and the New York Metropolitan and Long Island areas.

for rest and refreshment while awaiting their next turn in the water. On and on, throughout the day, they continue with their timed heats. Volunteer kayakers out of Chelsea Pier pace them, watching carefully for stragglers or tired swimmers. However fast or slow, whatever the distance covered in each heat, no one gives up. They are here on a mission and it is clear through the laughter and chatter between swim time that they are having a ball.

Linda Salzhauer decided to make a swimming trio with her two daughters, Eliana and Leora who are here for the second year in memory of their Dad. Among the three of them, they raised almost \$9,000.

Tim McKee, US Olympic silver medal winner in 1972 for the 400-meter swim, was in the water today and has been a regular participant



Swim Across America

by Janice Raber

An event like this doesn't happen without a lot of financial support and committed volunteers, this being no exception with 21 dedicated volunteer staff members, many of whom will also swim.

This year, the July 30 event will mark the 10th anniversary that swimmers have braved the waters of the Hudson, plunging in at the Tappan Zee Bridge and swimming down the river, under the George Washington Bridge (a distance of 15 miles from bridge to bridge) to end triumphantly at Chelsea Piers. Quite an undertaking! The 5-, 10- and 15-minute heats accommodate all levels of swimmers. Some of them are tried and true long-distance swimmers, some of them are brand-new swimmers, and some of them are rediscovering their love for the sport.

Last year's event started with registration at Chelsea Piers followed by a relaxing breakfast cruise up the river to the Tappan Zee Bridge starting point aboard the luxury yacht, *Excalibur*. During the journey, the participants were welcomed by organizer Bob Coakley, who initiated the Hudson River Swim. Safety precautions were reviewed and special awards such as "Rookie of the Year" were presented. Attending Olympians, World Class Swimmers and celebrities like Ethan Zohn, winner on *Survivor Africa* in 2002, were introduced. Lab doctors discussed their research and successes from the previous year's endeavor. Swimmers mingle and get to know each other. They are your wife, your boss, and your neighbor down the street. They are every man and they are doing something they love - swimming, in memory or in honor of a person important in their lives that had been touched by cancer. Last year they raised thousands of dollars for the privilege of being here and they want to make a difference. Coakley explains that of the \$300,000 they raised in 2003, ninety cents of every dollar goes directly to Sloan Research Lab.

Wearing the special goggles and color-coded caps provided to them, to the cheers of their comrades, each of the 60 swimmers jump off the yacht, one by one. The lead boat assumes its position of guiding the entourage down the river. Two scuba diving boats, *The Jeanne II* out of Sheepshead Bay and the *Wahoo* out of Captree Boat Basin in Bay Shore are on hand for the day to pick up each swimmer as they finish their heat, providing them with a floating island

for nine years. He says he will continue to swim until there is a cure. "There's a lot of motivation in the world for us to be doing this. When I see the kids suffering from cancer, they provide motivation for me to keep doing this work."

Kathryn Taubert lost her husband to cancer. As a former long-distance swimmer, she felt that this was a good cause, well-organized and decided that with her every stroke it would be her way of honoring her husband's memory.

"Unbelievable, is all I could think as I floated face upward, with the George Washington Bridge 200 feet over my head. Backdropped by a bright and cloudless blue sky, the sight was awesome," wrote Kathryn, the "Rookie of the Year" winner. "The irony," she added, "almost 25 years to the very day I relocated from Texas and first entered New York City across that mighty bridge. Here I was, swimming under it. One just never knows!"

Five and a half hours after the initial plunge under the Tappan Zee, everybody leaps into the water to swim under the George Washington just for the fun of it. As the temperature was pushing 98 that day, yours truly followed suit. After the "social swim," as it is referred to by the veterans, the last of the water-logged swimmers are picked up by the dive boats and motored the rest of the way to Chelsea Piers due to the danger in that part of the river. A few die-hards wanted to do the last distance from the end of the pier to the dock where welcoming cheers, shouts and hugs from friends and family greeted them. Excited, albeit somewhat tired, swimmers enjoy a buffet reception buzzing about plans to do it again next year.

In her letter of reflection to her supporters, Kathryn described the feeling that I am sure many swimmers shared. "A tiny stick figure waving down from the Bridge at the 61 'crazies' swimming the Hudson, bordered by yachts and dive boats and kayaks and zodiacs, all shouting and laughing at the immensity of it all, and how we had reached this milestone. It went spectacularly well." ■

This year the Hudson River Swim is scheduled for July 30th. To find out more about Swim Across America and how you can get involved, visit www.hudsonriverswim.com.