

Triathlon

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to benefit triathlon participants but it has proven a rewarding experience for the hosts as well. "My husband loves the triathlon and for him to have an elite athlete stay with us - he is just so happy to talk with them about the race, training and everything - it's been a great experience" said Yvonne Eckman.

This year 45 families will experience the joy first hand as they host approximately 85 triathletes. "We've been doing this forever," said Molly Peeler, whose family is housing two racers from Michigan this summer. "We skipped two years in a row because our vacation was scheduled during triathlon week, but we missed participating. The kids really get a kick out of it."

Families and athletes often develop a friendship which lasts long after the stay itself has ended. "Many triathletes contact their host families directly, they don't even go through us to make arrangements," said Kathy McHugh, chairperson of this year's homestay program.

The Peelers are one of the families who have bonded with a triathlete. "We became very good friends with a gentleman who stayed with us several years back," said Molly Peeler. "When he was featured on the cover of a national triathlon magazine, he sent us an autographed copy that we've framed and kept in our living room. We exchange Christmas cards and



Peter and Yvonne Eckman have hosted triathletes for several years. Peter Eckman also competes in the race.

keep in touch; it's really nice."

In addition to the homestay program there are many ways volunteers help make this triathlon a

success each year. "When you count up those who come out on race day - the police and paramedics, the people at each water

"We figured out the other night our core group of about 25 volunteers have over 200 years of experience, so they know what they're doing."

Pat Kramer
Triathlon volunteer

stop, the folks who take care of race registration, the lifeguards and the radio club guys - we have over 800 volunteers involved," said Harris.

Maintaining order with that many people working at one event is the responsibility of the triathlon's committee members. "It's an organized chaos," said Kramer. "We figured out the other night our core group of about 25 volunteers have over 200 years of experience, so they know what they're doing."

The dedication of people from the community is one of the reasons this year's race has been selected as the site of the North American Championship. "I think the ITU (International Triathlon Union) took a look at this event and saw that it is an incredibly organized race that meets their criteria for championship designation and is well respected by the athletes," said Harris.

A generous purse of \$15,000 is available to the top finishers but the Race Director thinks it's the dedication of volunteers that brings athletes back to the area every year. "Well, the prize money is certainly something that attracts the elite athletes," said Harris. "But it's the chance to be a part of this amazing community effort, to see all the people who are willing to spend their day in the heat and sun for nothing more than a t-shirt, that makes this triathlon unique."

PTA

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where to go if they have a problem at Dallas Elementary," said Walton. "The PTO is primarily concerned with fundraising and party planning. They don't have the ability to get involved in things like school safety."

Walton has been working with members of the administration, including Sam Barbose, Dallas Elementary principal, to increase playground supervision at the school. "There are 100 students playing outside during recess and up until last spring, there was only one teacher watching them," she said. "We were finally able to arrange for parental volunteers to sign up as recess monitors, but it took months."

Improving the flow of communication to avoid problems, such as the temporary cancellation of recess, is a high priority. "The message I have been given is 'send us your tax dollars and fund raising money but don't ask questions'," said Walton.

A parents advisory council has been established by the district in an effort to provide an intermediary. "Parents have a slew of options available to them if they have a concern," said Arnaud. "Nobody ever said the only way to deal with a problem is to act as a group. Parents are free to discuss issues with teachers, administrators, the school board or the advisory council but it's not part of our role as a PTO."

The PTO's mission is to enhance the educational experience of each student by providing funding for assemblies, class outings and special celebrations. "We work very closely with Dr. Speziale to identify and plan activities that benefit the students," said Arnaud. "Last year, we had the Dr. Seuss Day, a cultural diversity program and we used money collected from our fundraisers to pay for field trips."

PTO fundraisers have raised approximately \$36,000. "We budget \$25,000 for PTO sponsored activities every year," said Arnaud. "The money left over is kept in a savings account and sometimes a

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Karen Arnaud
PTO President

teacher or administrator will approach us with a specific request that we are able to fund."

Concerns about diminishing funds prompted parents of Lake-Noxen Elementary School students to form a PTO. "Basically, we switched from a PTA to a PTO because we felt we were sending a lot of money to PTA headquarters and we weren't getting much back," said Lake-Noxen PTO President Karen Laskowski.

So far the change seems to be working, although the Lake-Noxen PTO would appreciate contributions from more of its members. "We have been very successful each year thanks to our committee members," said Laskowski. "Without them this organization would be a flop but unfortunately it seems it's always the same 15 or 20 people doing everything."

The Dallas Elementary PTO plans several changes in order to increase its volunteer base. "We have scheduled open meetings to be held on the second Tuesday of every month and we hope parents will attend them and get involved," said Arnaud.

A shortage of regular meetings was a problem facing parents who wanted to become active members. "I want to be involved but it seems the public meetings are always announced the day before they are held," said Walton. "I don't have the kind of stop-and-go life that allows me to drop everything and go to a meeting on such short notice."

Other changes are in store for Dallas Elementary parents regardless of whether or not they choose to form a PTA. "I don't think we have a perfect organization; there are things we could do better," said Arnaud. "But we all have to work together to do what is best for the children."

"The difference is more than a letter."

Sandy Walton
PTA organizer

Busy race weekend features scores of star triathletes

By KASIA McDONOUGH
Post Staff

BACK MOUNTAIN - This year's Wilkes-Barre Triathlon features a large contingent of world-class athletes, a course in that is in perfect condition and a full slate of activities for fans.

Race Weekend begins with a Future Triathletes Fun-Run sponsored by Wyoming Valley Health Care System. The event is open to youngsters ages 8 to 13. Registration will be held at 9 a.m. followed by a presentation by Richard Huntington M.D., of Dallas, on "The Importance of Staying Active."

Representatives of Wyoming Valley Health Care System's STAR Fitness staff will lead the participants in a special pre-race session designed to teach young athletes proper warmup techniques. The Fun-Run, scheduled to begin at 10:30 a.m., is a one-mile race. All participants will receive t-shirts, race numbers and refresh-

ments while awards will be presented to the top finishers in each age group.

Many of the world's top triathletes will also be on hand this weekend, as the race is the site of this year's ITU North American Championship and participants will earn points toward qualification for the 2000 Olympic Games. Among those scheduled to compete are Martha Sorenson and Marcel Vifian who are returning to defend their 1998 titles.

Six members of the US Pan Am Games team are expected to join the race along with a group of Canadian triathletes. Fans and officials are anticipating a hard fought race with some of the elite contenders battling for prize money and the prestige of winning one of the season's premier events.

The course itself is also in great shape. "We have taken steps to insure the integrity of the swim

portion with water quality testing performed at various points throughout the summer," said Michael Last. "In addition, we have a crew that goes out every year prior to the race to clear gravel and debris from the bike and run sections of the course. They even sweep away goose poop which can be very slippery and poses a hazard to the athletes."

Where and When

The Wilkes-Barre Triathlon begins at 8 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 8 at the Harveys Lake Beach Club, where swimmers dive in for a 1.5 kilometer swim. They then get on

bicycles for a 40k ride out Rt. 29, across Lake Catalpa Rd., down Lower Demunds Rd., across Overbrook Rd. and out Old Rt. 115 to the Penn State Wilkes-Barre campus in Lehman. The final leg, a 10k run, leaves the campus and heads down Conyngham Rd. to Deer Park Rd. south to Jackson Rd., then up Mountain View Dr. to Sutton Lane, back to the intersection of Old Rt. 115 and Deer Park Rd., then down Deer Park to the finish at the campus.

The first elite finishers are expected at about 10 a.m. An awards ceremony will be held at 1:30 p.m. at the campus.

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