

I would like to provide some examples of why Peggy Stringer was chosen to receive the Charlotte Sanddal Inspirational Swimmer Award. A few choice words come to mind (from Charlotte herself): Dedication, Follow-through, Focus, Always Positive, Good Natured, Perseverant, Compulsive (in a good way!), and Ingenious.

Heather Grahame noted that Peggy spearheaded the effort to keep the Helena Masters swimmers motivated, engaged, and healthy when the pandemic began. She encouraged (if not corralled) swimmers to sign up for Mark Johnston's Open Water Virtual Grand Slam Swimming Series. Many, if not most of the Helena swimmers had never done that much open water swimming. This series led to many swimmers getting up at 4:45 am a few times a week to get to Canyon Ferry Reservoir for a morning workout that ranged from 45 minutes to well over an hour. Peggy joined in many of these swims, culminating in a 2.4-mile (full Ironman distance) swim, in which she was one of the first finishers. A second group, who were largely retired professionals, swam later in the day. This swimming not only maintained but strengthened the swimming community.



Karen Simpson, stated: “when a person inspires, they act or speak in ways that encourage us to behave in creative ways”. She shared some memorable moments with Peggy from this past summer, particularly their experiences swimming at Spring Meadow Lake. I was privileged to swim with Karen and Peggy at Spring Meadow Lake a few times, and one day we celebrated at the end of our swim by taking off our wetsuits and getting back in to swim in our swimsuits! Never a dull moment!



In addition, her kindness was evident as she made herself available to swim when other swimmers needed a swimming buddy (never swim alone!) – thank you, Peggy, from Heather, as they frequently swam together at Spring Meadow Lake early Sunday mornings. Peggy also counted laps for swimmers needing to complete the mile swim, including counting laps for Charlotte Sanddal and Heather Grahame.

Peggy and our fellow Coach Paul Landes initiated a Social Distancing Swim Challenge that took place throughout July, requiring swimmers to complete numerous swim events plus other healthy activities such as walking, hiking, and yoga, as well as volunteering for a non-profit, and calling a swimming friend who you hadn't seen in some time. Talk about accomplishing two critical goals: fitness and mental health! All for a very reasonable fee (\$10) which included a custom-designed T-shirt (by Peggy), face mask (which she custom made for each swimmer), and a waterproof cell phone case. While Paul and Peggy were hoping for 14 swimmers to sign up, their leadership and enthusiasm drew in 32 swimmers!



One of Karen's highlights was working on Challenge goals in the Lake with Peggy, instead of just swimming around it. When the outdoor pool opened, they rode their bikes there and continued working on the Challenge.

In addition, Karen stated that she swam her 2nd fastest mile in 4 years, thanks to Peggy's coaching, and in addition, started swimming the butterfly stroke, which she hadn't been able to do for years due to shoulder pain. She attributes these milestones to Peggy, who inspires her to be a better swimmer and person. I could wholeheartedly say that anyone who spends any time at all with her would feel the same way!

Heather added that Peggy also functioned as the interface between the Helena swimming community and other Montana swimming events. For example, she made sure swimmers knew about the Whitefish Swim Like a Fish Challenge, and later in the summer, Peggy encouraged our group to participate in the Bozeman Challenge, which she initiated by encouraging Guro Lindgren, Bozeman Swim Club President, and Sue Harkin to offer for the month of August. Sue shared that the Bozeman Challenge united the swimmers in their community and a number of swimmers around the country. She added that Peggy not only promotes swimming in Helena but around the entire country.

And don't forget about Peggy's impressive swimming and athletic ability! Peggy has goals and accomplishes them. A few years ago, she qualified for and raced in the IRONMAN World Championship in Hawaii: this is truly a remarkable accomplishment. More recently, she organized a women's relay team last year that won the 400-yard Medley Relay in the 320-359 age group. The team placed number one in the national Top Ten and received an "All American Award". Peggy is an inspiration for all swimmers in life as well as swimming.



As the Open Water season began to wind down, Peggy and Paul worked with both the Capital City Health Club and the YMCA to set up electronic sign-ups for limited Masters workouts, which at this time, are at the maximum capacity (8 swimmers) due to COVID safety protocols.

In addition to Coaching, Peggy continues to work tirelessly for our LMSC, and is the President of the Big Sky Masters group. Her efforts to keep all of us swimming and connected during the pandemic are commendable, and greatly appreciated by all of us – where would we be without her? She is truly an inspiration!

Lydia Kuderna