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From Front Page

Swim, Baby, Swim!

... continued from page A1



A toy is a great distraction for this tiny swimmer.

That is when they develop the large motor skills and maturity with which to learn skills like putting their face in the water, breath control, and how kicking moves them across the water, said Harriett Plummer of Harriett Plummer Aquatic School in Lafayette.

Still, 16-month-old JR Morgan happily splashed in 90 degree water at Sherman Swim, wearing a swim diaper, safe in the arms of instructor Katy Conlan. While engrossed with a plastic toy, JR was being led through a series of shallow end hops and skips, kicks and scoops, exposing him to the rudimentary dog paddle motion.

Sitting upright, he was encouraged to watch the motion of his kicking feet, something he wouldn't see lying on his stomach, Sherman said. Soon JR was seated on the pool edge and was asked to fall into the water, toward Conlan's outstretched arms. She guided him in a semi-circle, urging him to swim back toward the pool edge "safe spot." JR's head and face were thoroughly wet, yet there was no coughing, no panic.

"This is the first step in the prevention of drowning," said Sherman, who distributes a safe swimming brochure by the Safer 3 Water Safety Foundation that notes, in addition to constant supervision and established pool rules, children are safer when they master swimming skills at a

young age.

Sherman's instructors normally work with a student for only 15 minutes – the length said to be the maximum attention span for young children. Instructors use a combination of cues: verbal (counting "1... 2...3..."), visual (taking a breath themselves before holding it with "balloon cheeks") and physical (a lift in the air and drop to the water motion) to prepare a student for the task ahead.

Ben Alfisi, 21 months old, was next. He started sessions when he was 10 months old, said his mother Leigh Alfisi. Big brother AJ, 3 1/2, was in the water, too, working with instructor Haley Lyon. There were tears when AJ started his classes, Alfisi said, and he wouldn't get in the water.

"They actually both wouldn't get in the water at all for the first lesson. But I think Ben was feeding off of and

reacting to AJ's anxiety," said Alfisi. "It was mostly AJ who was quite scared."

"AJ was a tough one," admitted Sherman.

"Now they love it and ask daily if it's a 'swim lesson day,'" said Alfisi, who wants her sons comfortable in the water, especially since there is a pool in their neighborhood.

Rachel Day watched her daughter, June, who is not yet 3, begin her third session with Brianna Nicholson. "They are very gentle with their method," she said. Some of the young students even jumped off a low springboard with their instructors, and seemed unfazed by their accomplishment. But the children are never forced to do something that makes them uncomfortable.

"If nothing else, the children can be exposed to [swimming] and later it won't be a foreign feeling," Sherman said.

Water Safety Resources

The Safer 3 Water Safety Foundation, formerly Swim for Life Foundation, is a drowning prevention non-profit organization based in Tustin, CA. The organization's mission: Protect every life from drowning through education and heightened water safety awareness. For information about water safety, visit their website at http://www.swimforlife.org/about_us. Additional water safety websites include: <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/water-safety> <http://www.safekids.org/tip/water-safety-home-tips>

Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:

As a resident of Orinda's government housing, I want to respond to the letter of Mr. Henry R. Pinney and invite him to visit us at Orinda Senior Village in downtown Orinda. He can call me from the directory at the entrance. I would like to show him around our building of 150 apartments. This soon-to-be 30-year-old government housing is our home. I would like to introduce you, Mr. Pinney, to some great residents who may have been a cook, teacher, caregiver, artist, doctor, researcher, banker, a valued housewife, nurse, clerk, factory worker or manager, Cal Berkeley or Stanford grad, etc.

We moved here to be near family members living in this area as we age or because we are disabled. We are of many nationalities and languages, work and life experiences, mental and physical abilities. This challenging diversity of residents live together, mostly happily, and often help and care for one another. We care about and have invested in our apartments, our building, and around our building. Together, we garden, care for many plants inside and out, bird watch and maintain hummingbird feeders and a Bluebird trail, run a thrift shop, publish a monthly

in-house newsletter, exercise on equipment we helped pay for, play bingo and table tennis with equipment we paid for, plan a monthly outing, paint, write, help with grandchildren, etc.

Back of all the above is a local board that cares about Orinda Senior Village and the residents. They give of their time and talents to make possible what you will see when you visit us. We have a staff that works to keep it that way.

We are a community as diverse as Lamorinda. I do not know the statistics, but I doubt the names of our residents are on the police blotter any more often than those of other Lamorinda residents. We may use the paramedics more often! Like most Lamorinda residents, most of us know this is a great place to live and we want to keep it that way. We are grateful to live in Orinda Senior Village, in Orinda, and near to those we love as we are aging and living with disabilities. I look forward to showing you around our lovely government-subsidized Village in Orinda.

Mildred Salmon
Orinda