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Lafayette Resident Has Mastered the Masters

By Cathy Dausman



U.S. Masters Swimmer Alek Shestakov
Photos courtesy Richard Jacobberger

Alek Shestakov is the man you want to pick your lottery numbers. After all, Shestakov says, when it comes to swim competition, "I pick my events."

Shestakov competes as a U. S. Masters Swimmer. At the recent USMS spring national short course competition in Santa Clara, Shestakov picked the 200 yard individual medley race, swimming butterfly, backstroke, breast stroke and freestyle, the 400 yard individual medley and the 200 yard backstroke. He won all three events in his 65 to 69 year age bracket, and set a national record for his winning time in the 400 yard IM of 4:57.17.

Shestakov thinks he has a slight advantage, having recently moved into a new age bracket but he says at least one stroke - the muscle-driven butterfly - does get harder with age.

To hear him tell it, though, "you just show up, and you've likely earned a third place [finish]." In reality, Shestakov has been swimming competitively since before his days at UC Berkeley when he shared the water as a freshman to then-senior Dick Jacobberger.

Jacobberger is now Masters Swim Team Coach at Lafayette's Oakwood Athletic Club, where Shestakov trains. Jacobberger calls Shestakov "a hard worker, very disciplined, with a very dry sense of humor. He is excellent in all the strokes, thus a great IM-er."

"He is also a great open water swimmer," Jacobberger continued, saying Shestakov "led his teams at the Trans Tahoe Relay for the past 10 years." Shestakov and some of his "Lane 5" buddies also successfully finished the Maui Channel Swim a few years ago under extremely rough conditions, Jacobberger added.

Shestakov trains alongside fellow master swimmers Kevin Casci, Mitch Reed and Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin. "Alek is a focused and diligent trainer," Casci said. "He works hard and pushes his peers and more impressively pushes himself, even when he is swimming alone."

Reed noted that Shestakov "regularly trains with swimmers that are 15 to 20 years younger and relishes the opportunity to compete, chase down and pass the young guys." Reed called Shestakov "a technician with flawless strokes, great endurance, and a killer instinct."

Tatzin said that while Shestakov remains pretty understated about these accomplishments, he is a very good swimmer. "My goal is to see how long I can go before he passes me."

There are over 100 Masters Swim Clubs in northern California and Nevada, according to Oakwood Athletic Club's website. Anyone 18 or older with basic swimming ability may join a Masters Swim club; previous swim competition is not a prerequisite, nor is it a requirement to compete in meets. Most master swimmers simply seek better fitness.

Shestakov said his fellow master swimmers are "a really nice group of guys," and although members obviously can't talk during the training sessions, they do converse between swims. "I've made some very close friends [in this group]," Shestakov said.

U.S. Masters Swimming holds national competitions twice yearly, with a short course competition (in a 25 yard pool) in May and a long course competition (in an Olympic standard 50 meter pool) in August. FINA (international swimming federation) World Masters Championships are held bi-annually. Montreal will host this year's competition beginning July 27. The championships attract 8,000 athletes from 60 countries.

Shestakov, who also competed in Perth, Australia in 2008 is the only OAC member to compete, said Williams. Even for a guy in his 40s, Williams said Shestakov would be considered in shape, but he's 65.

The race times that Shestakov puts in are impressive, added Tatzin. "We don't have any other national record holders in our group."

USMS Spring Nationals results:

<http://www.usms.org/comp/scnats14/records.pdf>

2014 World Masters Championships, Montreal, Canada:

<http://www.parcjeandrapeau.com/events/world-masters-championships/>



Shestakov's "Lane 5" buddies, from left: Todd Williams, John Engs, Jim Kirchberg, Mike Barry, Kevin Casci and Terry Hendershott

Reach the reporter at: cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com

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