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## 40th Annual Bottoms Up Invitational Lets the Underdogs Shine

By Clare Varellas



Sleepy Hollow Legends' swimmer Mollie Appl finished the 9-10 girls' 50-yard butterfly in 34.76 seconds. Photo Gint Federas

"None of the other invitationals have immediate recognition," said Bottoms Up co-chair and Moraga Valley Pool parent Kristen Williams. "This is the one meet where we recognize kids before they leave the pool deck, and their parents get an opportunity to cheer for them and their friends get an opportunity to cheer for them."

There was certainly a reason to cheer for the swimmers, who together broke three individual meet records and two relay meet records. Orinda Country Club, the reigning OMPA champion, earned the most points, followed by Orinda Park Pool, then the Sleepy Hollow Legends.

The meet, which takes place around the midpoint of the busy summer swim season, provides an optimal venue for measuring swimmers' progress and speed as teams approach the OMPA Championship meet on August 7-9. The competitive atmosphere is balanced with fun, as suit-clad swimmers enjoyed pizza, shaved ice, airbrushed tattoos, and CREAM ice cream sandwiches sold from company booths on the pool deck between swims.

While looking ahead to OMPA, swimmers still have some work to do (and some fun to have) before the peak of the season arrives. As 9-year-old Moraga Valley Pool swimmer Beckett Randolph Malachowski says, it's not quite OMPA yet.

"I'm really working on trying to pop my time in backstroke, because I've had some trouble in backstroke lately," said Malachowski, illustrating with the backstroke arm motion. "My arms aren't moving fast enough, and I really need to get my arms through the water more."

The "bottom-year" format makes for some boosting of younger swimmers' confidence and a demonstrated reward for hard work in practice.

"It's a great opportunity for them to showcase their skills without having older kids there," said Mary Anderson, a coach at Sleepy Hollow Swim and Tennis Club. "It's a great philosophy."

Nearly 1,800 people gathered at Campolindo High School's Soda Aquatic Center on July 12 for what has become a favorite yearly tradition for the Orinda Moraga Pool Association: the Bottoms Up Invitational.

The swim meet, hosted by Moraga Valley Pool (a member club of the OMPA), was held for the 746 swimmers in the league whose ages pin them at the "bottom" of their swimming age groups. For example, the 5-year-olds of the 6-and-unders compete against other 5-year-olds while the 7-year-olds of the 7-8s compete against other 7-year-olds.

The philosophy of the meet has remained the same since its original organization by Moraga Valley Pool parents Craig and Linda McCay in 1976. But this year, commemorating the meet's 40th anniversary, Moraga Valley Pool also organized an awards ceremony to follow the meet in an effort to honor the high point swimmers and to announce the team results.



Photos Gint Federas



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[back](#)

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