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Three generations of dentists serve Lamorinda for 55 years



From left: Al, Mark and Blake Swimmer

Photo provided

By Kara Navolio

In July, Blake Swimmer became the third generation Swimmer to practice dentistry in Lafayette. His grandfather, Al Swimmer, began the general dentistry practice in 1963 when Lafayette's population was only about 7,000. For 38 years he served thousands of Lamorinda residents, the last 12 years, from 1988 to 2001, with his son, Mark. "Those 12 years were the best part of my life," said Al Swimmer.

Mark Swimmer now runs the practice and has taken his own son on as an associate. Although it may appear that a family business was the plan all along, Al Swimmer said, "I never pressured them to become dentists or suggested it, but I think they saw the friendship and support I had with other Lafayette dentists. Being happy in your work is reflected in the home."

In fact, Mark, a 1980 Acalanes High School graduate, went to Cal Poly, San Luis

Obispo and majored in food science. He was not planning to follow his dad into the profession. However, when he saw the types of jobs his classmates were getting in food science, he just wasn't excited about the field. He added one more year in college to take the science classes he needed, then went on to the dental school at the University of the Pacific, the same school his dad attended.

About 30 years later Mark Swimmer's son Blake, a 2011 Miramonte graduate, faced a similar crossroads. The University of Oregon junior, who was majoring in sports marketing, had a change of heart when he discovered his passion lay more in the sciences than in his business classes. Or perhaps there was a bit of a subconscious pull toward dentistry as his mom is also a dentist in Orinda, and he grew up hanging around both offices.

A young woman that Al Swimmer hired when he first started the business, Colleen

McCune Deutscher, became the office manager and was like a second mom to Blake and his brother.

Deutscher spent 50 years with the Swimmer Dentistry practice, starting as a part-time office assistant through high school and college. Her unexpected passing this past September has left a hole in all their hearts. "She was the glue of this place," stated Mark Swimmer.

Blake Swimmer changed his major and also went on to attend UOP's School of Dentistry, graduating this past summer. Patients now have more flexibility as they can see either Dr. Swimmer. Although retired now, Al Swimmer still meets for breakfast with fellow Lafayette retired dentists every week. The group used to have lunch together every day when they were practicing. "It's a dream come true," he reflected, "to have my son and grandson all working in the same profession, in the same practice."

American Red Cross teaches kids disaster safety with Pillowcase Project



Photo Suzanne Garrett

By Vera Kochan

Does your child know what to do in the event of a natural disaster? The American Red Cross has implemented a program called The Pillowcase Project aimed at teaching children how to get through this type of situation with a modicum of awareness.

The Pillowcase Project was created in 2005 by the American Red Cross in Southeastern Louisiana and first put into effect in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Kay Wilkins, the region's executive, discovered that Loyola University students put all of their valuables into pillowcases when evacuating for Katrina. Wilkins worked with an art therapist to design a pillowcase that children living in post hurricane shelters could personalize and use as an emergency kit.

The New Orleans-based program grew into local elementary school demonstrations and became fine-tuned through time. By 2016, it was so successful it became offered to schools nationwide.

Red Cross Concord representative Suzanne Garrett is the Pillowcase Project lead for Contra Costa County Disaster Services. She explained, "We started out going to schools,

but now we also visit Scout troops, summer camps and anywhere that we can spread the message to kids." Garrett has been running presentations for five years, and in August she took over the Contra Costa area.

It is the Red Cross' vision to empower children in understanding the science of hazards and to share with their family and friends the lessons they've learned. Garrett's most recent demonstration in November was to Springhill Elementary's fourth-graders in Lafayette. "I try to make it very participatory and have them ask questions. Typically the programs throughout the United States are tailored toward regional hazards. In California that usually involves earthquake preparedness." She added, "While at Springhill, the Camp Fire was still burning. It made the home fire safety part of the presentation pertinent. The kids knew about the fires and asked a lot of good questions."

The Pillowcase Project presentation is geared for grades 3-5 (ages 8-11) and lasts about 40-60 minutes. The program meets many performance expectations for the common core math and language arts standards and next generation science standards

for grades 3-5.

Some of the learning objectives are to identify the best ways to stay safe during community emergencies; identify the best ways to prevent and stay safe during a home fire; use coping skills; gain confidence and use their knowledge to help in their homes and communities.

Each child receives a My Preparedness Workbook, a pillowcase to personalize and use as a preparedness kit, and earns a certificate of accomplishment. Each teacher receives a Science of Safety Teaching Kit with additional lesson plans, three classroom posters, an education standards report to match curriculum to common core and next generation science standards and a copy of the students' My Preparedness Workbook.

The Red Cross is also offering free smoke detectors with free installations to homes nationwide. According to Garrett, "It's called the Sound the Alarm, Save a Life Program. The service is ongoing and indefinite at this point." To sign up for an appointment visit www.redcross.org/sound-the-alarm or call (510) 595-4573.

Garrett acknowledged, "The Red Cross doesn't know how many lives have been saved by these and other efforts to prepare people when disasters happen. Unfortunately, you can only compile statistics from worst-case scenarios. We can only hope that we've saved lives through teaching awareness."

To schedule a Pillowcase Project presentation for your school, after-school program, scout troop, summer camp or any other youth-serving site contact Garrett at suzanne.garrett@redcross.org or call (925) 771-8705 or (925) 216-7667.

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