

Campo alum uses Olympic-medal-winning philosophy to champion underserved youths



Kim Vandenberg has undivided attention at recent swim clinic.

Photos courtesy Kim Vandenberg



Vandenberg teaches techniques

By Vera Kochan

Kim Vandenberg, a Campolindo High School alum (2002), has won numerous swimming medals and is lucky enough to continue her love of the sport traveling the world teaching swim clinics. Not stopping there, she has been chosen as ambassador for Room to Read and Up2Us Sports. Both organizations serve underprivileged children.

No stranger to winning ways Vandenberg, a three-time USA Swimming National Champion, who specializes in the butterfly and freestyle, has won silver medals at the 2005

World University Games and at the 2007 World Championships in Melbourne, a bronze medal at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and two gold medals at the 2011 Pan American Games in Guadalajara.

At an early age, Vandenberg raced against her older brother, John, and younger brother, Michael. Although her sister, Lauren, was too young to race with them, she grew to compete in the sport as well. In addition to sibling support, her father and mother, Rick and Denai, along with all of her grandparents always attended her swim meets. “Even my great-grandmother, who was over 100 years old, came to watch me in her wheelchair,” Vandenberg recalled with pride.

Vandenberg credits her former Campo and Orinda Aquatics coaches Ron and Don Heidary, who coached her between the ages of 12-18, as well as her UCLA coaches, Cyndi Gallagher and Greg Meehan, for giving her a solid foundation and strong mental outlook to pursue her swimming dreams.

“Besides the Olympic bronze medal, I would say one of my favorites is the silver medal from the 2007 World Championships, because I was able to race against the world record holder at the time, Jessica Shipper. I went a personal best (2:06.71), and in that moment, I was second in the

world in the 200m butterfly.” Vandenberg added, “For me, it was a rare moment when everything came together – my mind and body were connected in a way that only happens a few times in an athlete’s career. I was in the zone and able to enjoy racing the best in the world with enough confidence to know I was one of them. It took a long time for me to see myself in that way, and once I did, I was able to push myself harder in the pool and enjoy the process.”

Born and raised in the Bay Area, Vandenberg now lives in Brooklyn, New York. A series of heartbreaking events caused her to pull up stakes and move to the other side of the country in 2012. She placed third in the 200m butterfly at the Olympic Trials, just missing a spot on the London Olympic team. “I had been training full time to qualify for what would have been my second Olympic team, but instead I was signing paperwork to be the first alternate, which was devastating to me at the time.” She was also going through a relationship breakup, and since she was planning on representing the New York Athletic Club during that year’s fall European races, moving there seemed like a logical choice.

As it turned out, the relocation was just what she needed. Vandenberg said, “I fell in love with the energy, the people and the diversity. It was

refreshing to meet people who knew nothing about the sport, especially after living in the swimming world bubble for so long – it’s a small bubble!” The change created “a balance between my athletic life and my search for something more than swimming.” She does return to the Bay Area a few times a year to visit her family.

Vandenberg occasionally still competes for the New York Athletic Club, stating that swimming helps her to stay active, healthy and is a good way to meditate underwater and away from technology.

When not competing, Vandenberg travels around the United States and the world teaching swim clinics and camps to younger competitive swimmers. Last year, she taught in Sri Lanka, and just last week returned from a trip teaching in Slovenia. She appreciates her travels in that it helps her to connect with people from varied walks of life.

Besides her busy teaching schedule, Vandenberg is an ambassador for the nonprofit organization Room to Read. Founded in 2000, Room to Read believes that world change begins with educated children. Their focus is on a deep and systematic transformation within schools of low-income countries by stressing the importance of literacy. Room to Read has benefited 12.4 million children across more than 20,000 communities in 15

countries.

Other ambassadorship duties are devoted to Up2Us Sports, an organization committed to engage, train and support sports coaches to transform kids living in underserved communities within the United States by serving as mentors. Over the past eight years, they have placed over 2,000 coaches that have positively impacted the lives of over 400,000 children.

Vandenberg first became aware of the two organizations through friends in New York. “I was very lucky to grow up in Moraga, a community where I was supported and encouraged to pursue my athletic ambitions. After traveling around the world, my eyes opened up to the many communities that lacked the support systems I took for granted when I was younger.” She added, “As an ambassador, I help fundraise, coach clinics, write, speak and raise awareness for their causes.”

Vandenberg’s current efforts include a fundraising goal for Room to Read. She hopes to support 50 girls in the educational program designed to help them succeed outside of the classroom. At this point, she has raised \$7,725 of her \$15,000 goal, stating, “I believe that investing in education is the key to success and hope to see girls around the world have the same opportunities I was given as a child.”

Throughout much of her swimming career, Vandenberg’s mantra was “Never stop believing.” She explained, “I believe in the power of the mind. Something I was able to do, with the support of my coaches and family, was to persevere through the many disappointments I faced in my swimming career. I have missed the Olympic team four times (2000, 2004, 2012, 2016) and I made it once in 2008. I love the sport and I will always love it. I think having faith in the journey is what it all comes down to.” She summarized, “While it was amazing to compete at the Olympic Games, having the smaller moments like creating life-long friendships and memories with people within the community is much more important at the end of the day.”

For information or to help Vandenberg achieve her \$15,000 goal as ambassador for Room to Read visit:

<https://give.roomtoread.org/team/170245>

For information or to donate to Up2Us Sports visit:

<https://www.up2us.org/blog/2017/10/2/ambassador-kim-vandenberg-hosts-swim-clinic-for-new-orleans-youth>

Vandenberg’s website is: www.kimswimstudios.com

LAC celebrates High School Visual Arts Competition winners



Photos provided

"Zebra on Cardboard," Shae Silva, Campolindo High School and "The Book Jacket," Larkin Stephanos, Campolindo High School

Submitted by Diane Athanasiou

The community is invited to join Lamorinda Arts Council during its monthly artist reception from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Aug. 4 at the Art Gallery at the Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way, to celebrate two High School Visual Arts Competition winners who qualified to compete in the California Art Education Association’s Youth Art Month Competition.

tion in March.

Art & Creative Materials Institute created Children’s Art Month in 1961 as an event to emphasize the value to children from participating in visual art education. In 1965 the nonprofit California Art Education Association was formed to provide a collaborative network to strengthen visual arts education. CAEA coordinates the Youth Art Month program at the state level.

Larkin Stephanos, a fresh-

man at Campolindo High School in Moraga, won in 2019 overall for all three competitions: the Lamorinda Arts Council’s High School Visual Art Competition, CAEA’s Northern California Level and CAEA’s State Level competitions. Her winning entry is entitled “Book Jacket.”

Shae Silva, a senior at Campolindo, won second place in the Lamorinda Arts Council’s High School Visual Arts Competition and is the winner of the prestigious CAEA Northern Cal-

ifornia 2019 Ruth Jansen Prize, which is awarded to a senior in the visual arts competition. Her winning entry is entitled “Zebra on Cardboard.”

The LAC will also celebrate Jill Langston, who is the art teacher for both students at Campolindo. An inspired and dedicated art educator, she brings out the best in her students as exemplified by Stephanos and Silva’s winning artworks.

In 2020 and beyond, art students participating in the

High School Visual Arts Competition will be encouraged to compete for these additional awards. For further information on the competition and CAEA program go to <https://www.caea-arteducation.org/yam>.

For more information regarding Lamorinda Art Council or to donate towards programs such as the High School Visual Arts Competition go to www.lamorindaarts.org or send an email to info@lamorindaarts.org.



Larkin Stephanos with her Book Jacket