



SUNDAY
JULY 17, 2005

The San Diego

Union-Tribune.

Stoked on strokes

Carlsbad instructors motivated by belief their swimming lessons save lives

By Whitelaw Reid
COMMUNITY SPORTS WRITER

Most women wouldn't jump for joy if their husband left a job with a steady income and good benefits to



Jeff Prior

run a community swimming program. But Jody Prior looked at husband Jeff's decision to resign from his position with a San Diego biotech company another way. "I was proud of him," she said. "I was basically thrilled. I think it takes a lot to let go of something secure and predictable and stick your neck out.

"It was a great company, and the future was looking bright, but what's the price for happiness — a secure future or living every day thinking, 'I'm glad I did what I did with my time today.'"

Jeff Prior, 38, first had the idea of starting a swimming program for kids in December.

Prior, a 14-time All-American at Cal who won medals at the Pan American Games and Goodwill



Jody Prior teaches Rachel Douty how to swim at the Water Wise Swim School in Carlsbad. Jeff Prior photo

Games, had just returned to masters swimming after a break from competition.

"I got back into the whole swimming environment and really enjoyed it," said Prior, the national champion in the 200 IM for his age group.

"I talked to so many people who just wanted to be stronger swimmers but not necessarily go to swim meets.

"They wanted to be a lifeguard or better at water polo or surfing but didn't have anywhere to go because it's a full commitment if you're on a (USA Swimming-affiliated) club."

In April, Prior started Water Wise Swim School out of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Carlsbad. The school is for swimmers of all ages and abilities.

While one of the program's goals is to train people for competition, Prior said he is placing equal importance on the safety of learning how to swim.

Prior said he was shocked to learn that drowning is the second-leading cause of accidental death in the United States among children 15 and under,

"That's one of the reasons I feel so

WATER WISE SWIM SCHOOL

What: Swimming lessons and classes for all ages and abilities.

Where: The Boys & Girls Clubs of Carlsbad, 3115 Roosevelt St.

Cost: \$110 for eight 30-minute lessons (no more than five kids in the group). A swimsuit is included with enrollment.

Phone: (760) 216-7946

Web site: waterwiseswimschool.com

E-mail: waterwiseswimschool@cox.net

good about doing this," Prior said. "I'm potentially saving people's lives.

"I think parents get their kids involved in all sorts of activities, which is great, but it's not necessarily saving their life. Maybe it takes half a year to become competent in the water, (but) then they're safe for the rest of their lives. The skills stay with them forever."

Another reason Jody Prior was so enthusiastic about her husband starting the program: She missed the water, too.

She was a former swimmer at Vista High and Palomar College and

used to be a swim coach at North Coast Aquatics, a top club in the area. That's where she met Jeff.

A massage therapist and real estate appraiser, she now spends a lot of her time helping Jeff teach classes.

"I've been in such an adult world lately," she said. "I didn't realize how much I missed kids.

"It's cool to see them do something they didn't think they could do. You boost their confidence a little. The look on their faces is just amazing. They swell up and they're like, 'I did it, I did it.'"

Jeff Prior knows he is taking a risk with the new endeavor but doesn't seem worried.

"Sometimes you wake up in the morning and say, 'I have to do something that makes me feel good,'" Prior said. "I wanted to get back to doing a service for the community and working with kids."

Added Jody: "I was happy because when you're living with someone you want them to be happy."

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