

From the 1972 Olympic Trials to 3733 Poolside Drive



After renting water at the Illini Pool in Danville, Illinois, for a few summers, Mick's Mom, known as Teach, built a 20 X 40 pool, inspiring the community and demonstrating how collective effort can create lasting change. This pool saw thousands of children and adults overcome their fear of water and come to respect the water as they learned to swim.

At this time, in 1967, Mick was working at ESCO company during the day and, in the evenings, would coach kids who wanted to learn about competitive swimming and diving. He would coach and train swimmers who wanted to swim at their local country clubs in the summer.

Because the swimmers were improving each time they competed, the families wanted their children to receive professional coaching and to experience what it would be like to swim in AAU meets.

Sue taught LTS while Mick started coaching seven kids, then 13, then 20, and it kept growing. Swimmers who had only trained in the summer now wanted to train indoors year-round with NSS.

They (Mick and Sue) joined AAU Swimming in Illinois and became involved in the monthly meetings held in Chicago. Illinois Swimming was seeking individuals (coaches) to become certified officials, and their mentors guided them through this important step, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

That was the next step; they both became certified swimming officials. They had wonderful mentors within Illinois Swimming and were excited to continue learning about AAU. Sue started getting more involved with the team.

When Illinois was awarded the Olympic Trials in 1972, Illinois officials invited them to serve as officials at the trials—witnessing this historic event and the Olympic spirit motivated Mick and Sue to pursue their dreams further, fueling their ongoing advocacy for aquatic facilities.

The experience was amazing. Working with Illinois Swimming, meeting Olympic Coaches, and witnessing Olympians set records at Portage Park motivated Mick and Sue to pursue similar community-focused aquatic projects.

When the trials were over, they felt mixed emotions: happy but sad. They started home, back to downstate Danville, Illinois. Mick would return to the corporate world, providing coaching in the evenings. Sue would take care of their kids and teach some lessons.

On their drive home, they stopped for dinner and reflected on their experience. The dinner conversation led them to a place they did not expect. They started the "what if" game. Realizing there was an

opportunity to take their "learn to swim" kids and train them to move onto an AAU swim team. BUT... how many kids can you coach in a 20 X 40 pool?

Their napkin sketches, displayed at the Build A Pool Conference, symbolize their community-driven vision, showing how closely their designs matched the actual pools built, with a humorous touch of BBQ sauce.

The first thing they did when they got home was approach TEACH, Mick's Mom. Mick said there was no way she would agree to building another pool. Sue said you only know once you ask. Teach did not hesitate; she answered, yes, let's make it bigger.

The second thing they did was talk with local businesspeople to see what they thought about creating a Learn to Swim business. They asked 22 people what they thought, and one said it was a great idea. All others thought it was a crazy idea and tried to discourage them from going forward.

The third step was to assemble a team of professionals, including architects and engineers, to be part of the design team.

Fourth was to find the dollars.

Mick and Sue built their Dream Pool in 1972 and opened it to the public in 1973. Like any business, it grew and evolved, adding more value to the community. They went from Nelson School of Swimming to Nelson School of Swimming and Fitness Center, then to Poolside Health and Wellness Center. In 1995, they opened Water Way Therapy, an outpatient Medicare-approved business within Poolside. Maybe the 21 people who thought it was a bad idea now know that Aquatic Centers can be functional and sustainable.

The point is how the 1972 Olympic Trials motivated two young coaches to follow their dreams. Now, the two of them continue to advocate for aquatic facilities and professionals. We can never have too many aquatic centers that provide swimming lessons, swim teams, water exercise, and water therapy for the communities.

To learn more about how the four program pillars support functional and sustainable facilities, you can register for the Coaches Build & Program A Pool Workshop. www.totalaquatic.llc