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Triathlon to benefit Children's Hospital

By Cara McDonough : The Herald-Sun chh@heraldsun.com May 26, 2007 : 7:37 pm ET

CHAPEL HILL -- The kids who run, swim and cycle next weekend will not only be competing for top honors in the first-ever Swim for Smiles Triathlon, they'll be raising money for children being treated at the UNC North Carolina Children's Hospital in Chapel Hill.

The event is one of three fundraisers that will be hosted by the Swim for Smiles organization in upcoming weeks. In addition to the triathlon, to be held on June 3, there's a swim meet Thursday and the Wacky Relay Day on July 15.

Gary Kayye founded the Swim for Smiles organization two years ago to raise money for local children's hospitals. Swim for Smiles has generated \$14,000 in funds for both the N.C. Children's Hospital and Duke Children's Hospital in the past two years.

This year, Kayye's hoping to make it to the \$20,000 mark. And that's not all. He wants the annual volunteer-run fundraiser to keep growing, maybe one day going national. That's why he's expanded the event every year, this year adding the triathlon -- open to children ages 7 to 17 -- to the lineup.

"I think that the reason why people may choose to participate in it is the fitness aspect but also UNC Children's Hospital is a great cause," Kayye said.

The event, which will take place at the Chapel Hill Country Club, is a great chance for young athletes to compete, and Kayye said members of swimming, cycling and other teams have contacted him to sign up. But everyone, no matter their level of athletic experience, is invited to attend.

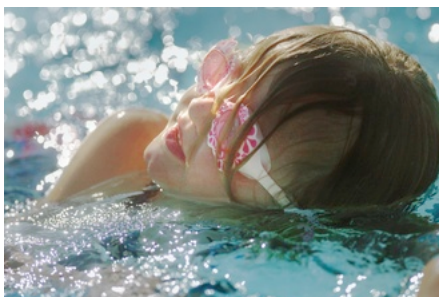
"It's not like you have to be an uber-athlete to do this," Kayye said. "This is something we encourage all kids at all levels to do and everybody's going to come out a winner."

For instance, there are a few Special Olympics participants registered who are top athletes in their individual fields, but not as competitive in other sports. That's all right, said Kayye. A top swimmer will make up in the pool for time lost while biking.

"The triathlon is the ability to do multiple sports," he said. "And these are activities that are not always offered in the schools. These are sports you can do your entire life."

Aaron Kiefer and his triathlon team, the Elite Triangle Triathlon Team (www.elitetriangletriateam.org) helped Kayye organize this year's event. Kiefer, who has participated in triathlons all over the country for several years, said he encourages kids who haven't tried the sport to give it a go.

"I think a lot of kids have had an introduction to swimming, running, but it's a new challenge to put them all together for them," he said. "It's a good idea to expose kids to as many sports



The Herald-Sun/Bernard Thomas Seven-year-old Olivia Kayye practices her stroke at the Chapel Hill Country Club pool in preparation for Swim for Smiles Triathlon, which will be held on June 3.

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as possible. There are people of all different ages and abilities who participate."



Overall accessibility extends to financial and geographic aspects of the event as well. Children from all over the state will participate, and registration is just \$15, with scholarships available for kids who want to participate but can't afford the fee. Kayye said they can contact him and enter free of charge.

Courtney Fancsali, the annual fund coordinator for children's programs at the N.C. Children's Hospital, said a lot of the money raised through fundraisers like Swim for Smiles goes to fund grants requested by doctors, nurses and other hospital personnel.

For instance, they've funded having a clown come into the hospital once a week, and having all patient information translated into Spanish -- "really innovative programs that help our patients," Fancsali said.

She said she is incredibly thankful for programs like Swim for Smiles.

"When you're in the hospital, it's not fun, but if you can make it a little better that's great," she said. "The support we receive from our community is so appreciated and we couldn't do the work we do without them."

For more information on the Swim for Smiles organization, including information on how to register for events and how to donate, visit www.swimforsmiles.org.

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