

Long distance swimmer to take on new challenge

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

Colleen Shields of Georgetown will join four other female swimmers later this month to tackle a unique 305 km crossing of Lake Ontario.

Instead of the traditional Niagara-on-the-Lake to Toronto 51 km route, the women are going to swim a relay from Kingston to Burlington starting July 23. They have dubbed the relay "Because Girls Can."

"It has not ever been attempted that I'm aware of," said Shields. She said many people have talked about making such a trek, "but nobody really took the bull by the horns and said let's do it."

Joining Shields for the relay are 47-year-old Nicole Mallette of Hamilton, Samantha Whiteside, 23, from New Hamburg and Markham teenager Rebekah Boscaroli and another 18-year-old, Mona Sharari, of Richmond Hill, who conquered the English Channel last summer.

The swim will be a fundraiser for Plan International's "Because I am a Girl" campaign—a global initiative to end gender inequality, promote girls rights and lift millions of girls, and everyone around them out of poverty.

The team hopes to raise \$300,000.

Shields, 61, the oldest member of the team, is challenging Halton Hills residents to each pledge a dollar to the campaign.

"If everyone contributed a loonie it would be \$59,000," said Shields.

She said half of what they raise for "Because I am a Girl" will stay in Canada.

"We're shooting for a big amount because it's really important."

The women will all start the challenging relay in the water together, then take turns likely logging about two hours at a time.

"If we run into cold water we have to shorten those (two-hour stretches)," said Shields. They expect to come ashore in Burlington on July 27.

She said they have some great support from people. They have sailboats, a powerboat and crew accompanying them. Shields said they are actually looking for a crewmember to take over for one of the sailboat owners while he sleeps. The boat will be under power not sail. Anyone interested is asked to contact Shields at colswims32@gmail.com or 416-707-8099.

They don't know what kind of conditions they will face during relay.

"It's all up to Mother Nature and she's not my best friend," said Shields who

has successfully crossed Lake Ontario from Niagara on the Lake to Toronto solo in 1990 and 2006 and made five unsuccessful attempts including one last summer. High winds, and waves have foiled some of her previous crossings.

She's recently begun training in the pool and the lake as her doctor just gave the go-ahead following a winter and spring of bronchial issues.

"I love the lake. I have an enormous respect for it."

Shields is planning to tackle Lake Ontario solo again—maybe next summer.

"I can't let it go, as far as I'm concerned I'm a failure," she said. "I opened up a can of worms back in 2000 and now I have to close it."

To make a donation to Because Girls Can go to https://www.facebook.com/pages/Because-Girls-Can/344362399012459?id=344362399012459&sk=ap_p_18015191938, through the link on the team's blog at <http://blog.becauseiamagirl.ca/marathon-lake-ontario-swim-to-support-because-i-am-a-girl/> or at any Scotia Bank by mentioning they want to donate to the Because Girls Can Swim relay.



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