# Health

# Zamuner swims to turn the tide on stigma

**By Nathan Howes**
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Exercise is vital for your physical health, but also beneficial to your mental health.

That's why Frank Zamuner, 74, spent every day last week at Brookdale Swimming Pool for the second annual Swim for Mental Health.

The trail to Brookdale and the swim event began in 2005.

That's when Zamuner underwent a bypass operation.

During his recovery time at home, he found it difficult to be stationary most of the time, as he was an active person before the surgery. Sleeping problems arose and eventually he became depressed.

"While looking for help I found out how great a need there is for psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and related medical equipment. Depression does not discriminate; it affects people from all walks of life, young and old, rich and poor," said Zamuner.

"What I want to do is help people. Mental illness is an epidemic. There is so much of it and it affects all of us and there's nothing to be afraid or shamed (of)."

With the support of Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital (OTMH) and various sponsors, Zamuner and his wife, Lea, approached the hospital last year to set up a fundraiser to raise awareness about mental illness. He had been involved in OTMH's mental health outpatient clinic in Oakville through his depression.

"One of Frank's strengths is his swimming. He's done it for years and actually found it very therapeutic. He found solace in swimming," said Trevor Nash, community fundraising officer for the Oakville Hospital Foundation.

"Out of that experience, he wanted to help others who suffer from mental illness, whether it be depression or otherwise."

Last year, Zamuner helped raise almost $15,000 for patients of OTMH's Mental Health Program and Oakville's Day Program. This year, he has helped raise $21,000 that has come in as of Aug. 17, bringing the two-year total to more than $35,000.

"The swim was very successful. We started on Monday (Aug. 9) and today (Aug. 13) was really busy for me. The reason I can't swim that much is because of how many people were here and they want to take pictures and talk to me," said Zamuner.

Zamuner swam 110 lengths of the pool each day, which took him just over an hour to complete each time. He swam over 500 lengths of the pool for the week, while more than 30 other swimmers helped him achieve a total of approximately 3,500 lengths of the pool. That amount is equivalent to 87.5 km.

"Swimming for me has been the best therapeutic thing you can do for yourself because when you are swimming, basically what happens (is) your inducing yourself to go into water," said Zamuner. "In other words, you must breathe and the breathing is one of the most important things you can do.

"For instance, you swim for an hour or an hour and 15 or 20 minutes continuously, (and) when you come out you evaporate all the anxiety you feel. It's a wonderful thing to do therapeutically. Exercise is one of the most important things you can do when you are depressed."

For Zamuner, the number of laps he was able to swim last week is nothing out of the ordinary for the 74-year-old. He swims five days a week, sometimes six, for 2.5 km each day on a regular basis.

"It's been a gradual thing. I was evaporating the anxiety I was feeling. It was something that inspired me to do more and more every time. To swim 110 lengths in an hour is nothing."

Nash is astonished with the amount of time and laps Zamuner can swim in a day.

"The one thing that's amazing about Frank, and what I saw first hand yesterday (Aug. 9) is he swims for an hour and a half straight. He's a 74-year-old man. He does not take a break. He swims from 12:30 to 2 (p.m.)," said Nash. "In that time, he can swim from 100-120 laps himself."

Dr. Alan Brown, chief of psychiatry at Halton Healthcare Services (HHS) was in attendance at Brookdale pool Friday to thank Zamuner for his support. Brown stresses the importance of mental health and adds that just because someone has a mental illness, it doesn't mean they have a sickness.

"People assume that thoughts are a sickness. People can't help having mental problems. It doesn't mean there's something wrong with our soul. It's a physical problem we have. It's something we are born with," said Brown. "It's like having arthritis or diabetes (or) anything else. Most of us have experienced mental health problems in our family. It touches everybody."

The money that's been raised so far by Zamuner and the other swimmers will be going towards the purchase of essential equipment for the Mental Health program at OTMH and the Day Program in Oakville. Provincial governments do not provide funding for these types of acquisitions, which is why fundraisers such as the Swim for Mental Health are vital to the hospital, said Nash.

"It's not just about raising money, but it's about touching the people who will benefit from the services and equipment that will be purchased through this event," said Nash.

"We have to do a better job to support mental illness and reduce or remove the stigma. Mental illness is our head, our brain, it's no different than any other organ in our body and sometimes it goes haywire," said Zamuner. "It doesn't matter who you are, we deserve to be happy and we deserve to be in peace. When you don't have that, it's a difficult battle every day. I've been there and had a difficult time."

For more information on the Swim for Mental Health, including making donations, you can visit the website at www.swimformentalhealth.com.



ERIC RIEHL / SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

**MAKING WAVES:** Frank Zamuner celebrates the completion of his second annual Swim for Mental Health.