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SPORTS: Swimming up a storm in Uxbridge

Aldcroft hopes to rule the waves

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

For Nicole Aldcroft, a predawn wake-up call on a Monday morning is the signal that another week of juggling school work, household duties and her ambitions as a competitive swimmer is about to begin.

The 17-year-old is one of several Stouffville area residents who have made their mark with the Uxbridge Swim Club since its inception in 1986.

The club represents an opportunity for aspiring young swimmers to receive professional level coaching while competing against clubs from Ontario, the rest of Canada, and, in some cases, other countries.



NICOLE ALDCROFT
Enjoys making the journey to swim in Uxbridge

With a lack of an indoor pool in Stouffville, area residents looking to swim competitively are forced to look beyond the town borders for a suitable club.

For Aldcroft and her parents Don and Bonnie, the drive up Highway 47 to Uxbridge to keep up with a schedule that sees their daughter in the pool twice some weekdays, in addition to weekend meets, is part of the price they've had to pay for Nicole to pursue her chosen sport.

"There's a lot of driving, it's a real commitment for the parents," said Bonnie Aldcroft.

But she feels it's worth it.

"It's taught her a lot about self discipline," Nicole agrees.

"It's really helped me be organized with things like my school work."

Nicole is among a group of roughly 30 Uxbridge club swimmers who have met the tough standards required to qualify for the Prairie Invitational Swim Meet to be held the first week in December in Winnipeg.

Nicole has also qualified for the upcoming Senior Provincial Swim Championships for the first time. She had previously qualified for the Age Group Provincial finals.

Nicole's successes have been noteworthy, notes Uxbridge club coach Mary Bryon.

"Nicole has progressed quite nicely," said Bryon, who along with her husband and co-head coach, Terry, founded the club.

While Nicole is yet to achieve her peak, another area resident, Claremont's Judy Koonstra, has already stroked her way to prominence through the Uxbridge club.

The 18-year-old was third in Canada in the 200-metre butterfly at the Canadian Swim Team's 1996 Olympic Games Trials in Montreal.

The veteran club swimmer is currently swimming with the Brown University swim team in Providence, Rhode Island.

Koonstra, whose younger sisters, Kelly and Melissa, also swim with the Uxbridge club, is one of several club members currently swimming on Canadian and American university swim teams.

Through the years she has competed successfully for Canada in several international competitions in Europe.

Claremont's Ashleigh Thomas, a 15-year-old Uxbridge club swimmer, has already achieved Youth National status and is currently striving to qualify for national level competition.

As for the credentials of Uxbridge club coaches Mary and Terry Bryon, both have national level affiliations. Terry, who swam with the University of Toronto swim team in decades past, is team physician with the Canadian Swim Team. Mary was manager of the national swim team that travelled to Argentina in 1995, and was assistant manager of the Canadian Swim Team at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

While the emphasis is on competitive swimming with the Uxbridge club, Bonnie Aldcroft insists her daughter is making her own choices as she pursues her amateur swimming career.

"She's done it because she wants to do it. And she enjoys the kids she's met there."

Nicole, who hopes to land a spot on a university swim team upon completing high school, admits it can be a grind answering the bell for those early morning practices. But she says the benefits outweigh the negatives.

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