



PALM STREET PERSPECTIVE

COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS KEY TO SUCCESS OF SLO TRIATHLON

By SLO City Councilman, John Ashbauagh

EACH YEAR IN MID-SUMMER, our City's Parks and Recreation Department hosts the San Luis Obispo Triathlon in Sinsheimer Park. This event attracts 1,250 participants, mostly individuals but also teams of three.

The Triathlon involves a ½-mile swim at the City's pool; a 15.1-mile bike ride through the scenic wine country along Orcutt Road; and a 3.1-mile run along the City's Railroad Safety Trail, over the Jennifer Street Bridge and back up Johnson Avenue to Sinsheimer Park.

The focus of the SLO Triathlon is **COMPLETION**, not competition. That seems to me to be a great way to approach life generally, does it not?



This year's winner was Chris Stehula with a time of 1 hour, 4 minutes and 53 seconds... No surprise there: 25-year old Chris has won this event seven years in a row.

The 31st Annual Triathlon on July 25th was the best one yet! It was also the first Triathlon where I entered as an individual – and I'm quite pleased to be able to report that I completed the entire course in under 2 hours (1:56:03, to be exact). I will readily confess that by the time I chugged over the finish line at Sinsheimer Stadium, I was exhausted! The run up Johnson Avenue nearly did me in, but somehow I stayed on course (though I did end up walking for a few steps).

Putting on the Triathlon requires the dedication of many Parks and Recreation staff, particularly Rich Ogden, our Recreation Supervisor. Besides Rich, about 50 employees work the event, including staff from Parks and Recreation, Public Works and the Police Department. The Highway Patrol and County Public Works staff also help assure the safety of the participants, particularly bicyclists on Orcutt Road.

The Triathlon is truly a "Community Event," requiring the support of over 200 volunteers. Members of the Senior Center stuff all the race packets before the event. Two volunteers come all the way from Fresno: Nancy Roberts,

in charge of the pool for thirty Triathlons (all except for the first one), and Ron Santore who manages the timing for the event.

There is a genuine "carnival" atmosphere around the stadium: The Kiwanis De Tolosa puts on a BBQ, and there are 15 vendor booths featuring sports apparel, energy drinks, massage, information booths, and face painting for the kids.

The SLO Triathlon differs from similar events in other cities, in that its focus is **COMPLETION**, rather than competition. Each participant is encouraged to attain his or her own personal goal. This short course triathlon accommodates the novice participant, and still gives the experienced participant a challenge.

Of the 1,250 participants this year, 320 were from out of the County – and 30 were from out of state: Nine were from Utah, four Floridians, two Washingtonians, two Oregonians, three Texans, three Virginians, one Arizonan, two New Mexicans, two Nevadans, one Kansan, and one "tarheel" from North Carolina. There was a group of about 20 from Visalia, and another group of 25 from Temecula.

Fourteen SLO City employees also participate, urged on by your City Council. One of these was our Acting Finance Director, Debbie Malicoat. Her teammates, retired City employees Barbara Ehrbar and Viv Diltz, had taken the time to chalk lots of "graffiti" on the running course to root for her: I too was cheered by seeing several dozen versions of "You can do it, Debbie!" along the 3.1 miles! Their team finished with a time of 2:09:38.

I will never forget the first two times I participated in the Triathlon, in 2004 and 2005. I took the bicycling leg with a team composed of my neighbor Dr. Greg Thomas, a skilled swimmer, and Doug Carroll – "Pastor Doug," as he is commonly known. We got one of the first start times, and Greg and I did our parts in the usual way, but Doug, who uses a wheelchair due to his continuing struggle with multiple sclerosis, was given permission to start the running course at the same time as us. Doug used a walker, but otherwise he stepped the entire 3.1-mile course, with his wheelchair right behind him commandeered by Barbara Furia. In 2005, Doug crossed the finish line at around 4:15 p.m., and helped our team to earn the record (longest!) time for completing the SLO Triathlon of 8 hours, 52 minutes and 19 seconds.

To repeat: The focus of the SLO Triathlon is **COMPLETION**, not competition. That seems to me to be a great way to approach life generally, does it not?