



**WINTER 2022 NEWSLETTER**





# IGLA 2022 Palm Springs!

 by James Ballard

Hello IGLA, it's Greater Palm Springs,

We have a date. We begin April 6th and run through April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022, or longer, if you can't bring yourself to leave the healing rays of the desert. Swimming, water polo, an artistic swimming exhibition, and a Pink Flamingo, hosted jointly by WH2O and the Long Beach Grunions, is what you really need to know. Dress will be very casual as in nylon or elastane, or not. You decide. We're giving you stripped down and still planning, so details will follow. For now, just mark your calendar, Championship, because we will be celebrating thirty-five years of making history in the aquatic community.

*Creative talent by Heather Lenefsky and a major thank you to her wife Caroline Britt.*

We haven't finalized the schedule or organized what is happening after you pull yourselves out of the water and air dry beneath the palm trees, but we know you want to have a good time, so, we have a mission because we want you to have a good, no make that a great time, and are working on a few ideas. We know you may be Very Dry at times and, no promises, but there are more than a few places to meet and greet down the street and around the corner.

It's all very close, that is by California standards, and we are inviting plane loads of people you know and love, a few people most people despise, and a whole lot of people who like to watch and cheer. Yes, we know how to throw a party and run an event that will make you forget about all the things you missed when we couldn't.

The hotter news is now we can, and we are looking for brains and bodies to help people who can. You know what I mean, volunteer. We have a place for you to help make more history, strengthen our community, and reboot your social skills all at the same time. Yes, we want you to join us to make friends and strangers welcome. All you have to do is step up and play to your strengths.

Show your hidden talent and your heart. That is how we win. We dig deep and that is why we are West Hollywood Aquatics and why we are proud to share this journey with the Long Beach Grunions. Much Love and help us bring more to April 6-10<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

## THE CONNECTION



West Hollywood Aquatics and the Long Beach Grunions both formed around a basic purpose: Make the world of aquatic sports a better, more egalitarian, and more accepting place. It was, in large part, about carving out a safe and supportive space for athletes who wanted a more supportive experience in the water, mostly gay and lesbian, but it went past that because the barriers that locked out the LGBTQ+ community locked out so many others. That to me is why the plus is so important. We swim and scrimmage better together. That has always been true because we share the same vision and have fought the same battles.

Many things have changed since our teams formed. We have grown and evolved and broadened our outreach in keeping with our founding principles and values. We cared about building community centered on pride and encouragement because if we didn't, who would? We have always swam with courage. Back in the day, even to register with our teams meant you were taking a public stand and you could be targeted as either one of those people or a sympathizer. Not a big deal in concept until you were fired or found your career blocked, maybe denied a security clearance or a promotion, or your family turned you away from you. There were real consequences and yet people made history by joining and then stepped up and volunteering to make us stronger.

Some of our founders now may seem like they were fearless. They were not. They had to face their fears and lean into the fight for change. They chose to commit. They thought about making a difference for others who did not have their strength. They volunteered. They gave heart and soul and made a difference. Some of these originals are still with us, though many are not, but their passion lives on in us and every day we continue their journey and their work. I believe in that work, and I am grateful to everyone who has brought us to where we are today. I celebrate their contributions. That to me is giving back and that is why I am so proud to share this race to IGLA 2022 with the Grunions. Who would have thought that simply fighting for the dignity of standing on the blocks or for fielding a team could mean so much? That is why giving back is so important to our teams. It is in essence who we are.



IGLA 1992 Seattle, Photo courtesy of Errol Graham



IGLA 1988 San Diego, Photo courtesy of Tom Wilson



IGLA 1988 San Diego, Photo courtesy of Mauro Bordovsky



IGLA 2020 Melbourne, Photo courtesy of James Carameta



IGLA 2000 Paris, Photo courtesy of Errol Graham



IGLA 1991 Los Angeles, Photo courtesy of Errol Graham

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

We have three months till the first day of IGLA 2022 and while we have made great strides and accomplished much there are challenges that lie ahead of us. We listened to those who said it was too difficult, that it was too hard, and that we would fall short. We listened, but anyone who knows us knew we would just do that, listen, then do what others would not. We tapped into our drive, our commitment, our determination, and our combined talent. We figured it out and won't give up until everyone is dancing and celebrating another successful IGLA with friends and athletes on the evening of April 10, 2022. We will celebrate, but for us to fully achieve our shared goals we your need help. We need your courage and commitment. We need athletes, friends, community supporters as volunteers and we need to work together to achieve our goal of IGLA 2022. We need volunteers to help us to coordinate, to plan, to reach out, to encourage, to publicize, and to sell literally the t-shirts off the fences or off our backs, in some cases. What are your strengths? What motivates you? How can you be part of IGLA 2022? We need volunteers whose energy, enthusiasm and drive will be put to great use in the following areas:

- A. **Social Events** – It's the eat, drink, and be merry (or Mary or marry) after the water. Get up close - get personal - because the luckiest people are actually the people who help people.
- B. **Sponsorships** – Running a successful IGLA takes money. PS 2022 can work to promote products, pride, and potential, so please join us to help match up our events with those who are open to contributing.
- C. **Media** – Who doesn't want to be an IGLA 2022 Agent or Writer? They are the lucky ones who get invited to the best parties and everyone wants to get to know them. These are the people who can see the next big thing and that takes talent.
- D. **Food** – These are the people who have taste and like to say, "coffee, tea, or..." or "it's so tasty too" with a smile. Yes, who doesn't like to serve it up - hot or cold?
- E. **Wranglers** – How good are you at making perfect strangers believe they want to do what you need them to do? This is where you get to show them how and what and where, like "walk this way."
- F. **Merchandising** – Gucci has nothing on IGLA 2022 style and and as one famous designer once said - packaging is everything. Think pink, orange, and light teal in a cerulean blue way.

G. **Informacija** – What happens when someone needs basic help? Who will be there? Who will explain how to ask for information in Croatian? Just say, “YES.”

H. **Greeters** – The welcoming committee(s) need the charming and gracious. Aren't you charming and gracious or, at least, charming? Who could say no to that my Prince or Princess?

There are jobs large and small, some simple and some that will take skills. This is a production and you can be part of the cast or the ensemble. It's up to you. Tell your strengths and availability. Are you better at meeting and greeting large numbers of people or working with a close knit group of the dedicated? We will listen and we will help you figure out how you can make IGLA 2022 a better IGLA 2022. Work the meet. Work the people. Work it out, but you need to work. You just can't work anyone's last nerve, unless they are out of line and then, you can take them down to where they belong.

Join the few, the brave, the dedicated - the fearless - the Volunteers of IGLA 2022.



*Thank you to our fabulous V.P. Social Marcus Hernandez for doing so much to organize this oh-so-jolly reunion!*



# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

## VP Social Marcus Hernandez



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

I believe I've been on the team 12 years now; second time on the board as VP Social.

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

Looking forward to more social events for the team as safety guidelines permit. A chance to help and create more friendships in our swim community. As part of the Welcoming Committee also, I want to ensure all new and current swimmers feel included and welcomed and have a place to seek for direction.

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I had the pleasure of being in a fitting room styling Chris Hemsworth for about half an hour while he was just in his undies LMAO. It's a fact and it was fun. 😄

# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

## **Water Polo Representative Dan Hekman**



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

I've been on the team about a year, and this is my first time on the board.

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

The reopening of the WeHo pool and hopefully more in-person events.

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I spent the first 20 years of my life in Southern California, then spent the next 18 years in western Michigan, New York City, and Miami before coming back to SoCal in 2018.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

**Development Coordinator Deb Jourdain**



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

I've been on the team since 2018. This is my second time on the board.

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

I'm looking forward to being involved in the fundraising side of things, and also to do a year on the board that hopefully doesn't involve a hard core pandemic year (my first time was 2020).

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I saw my first Great White while swimming in 2020. FUN (not).

# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

## VP Admin Steve Wyllie



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

I have been a member since 1989 when I joined to train for Gay Games III in Vancouver, B.C. in 1990. I was on the board in various capacities in the mid 90's.

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

Reconnecting with teammates after having been solely an occasional swimmer for the last several years.

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I had a close encounter with a ghost in Australia before IGLA Melbourne in 2020.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

## Treasurer Andrew Sullivan (Sully)



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

I joined the team in Feb 2020 right before lockdown, but fortunately I made a couple friends who invited me to ocean swimming when we didn't have pool practices. Yes, this is my first time on the board.

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

Giving back to the team. I moved to L.A. in 2019 for work and didn't know many people. Without the connections I made on the swim team, it would have been a very lonely Covid year.

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I was never a swimmer until I joined the gay swim team in Atlanta. I was a distance runner through college. My first Gay Games was in Cleveland, which is where I'm originally from. It was a lovely homecoming to be back in town and have my parents watching me run at the track meet.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

## Secretary Caroline Britt



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

Three years and yes, this is the first time on the board!

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

The WH2O team and swimming are such an important part of my life. I'm looking forward to contributing and being a bigger part of the team.

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I once bought an extremely overpriced ski jacket, because Goldie Hawn was in the same store while I was trying it on and she told me that I looked amazing in it... It's totally not my style, I've never worn it and after all these years, I still can't bring myself to get rid of it.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

## Swim Representative Keely MacDonald



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

I've been on the team since July 2016. I hadn't swum in a decade at that point but the time helped me rediscover my love for swimming! It's my first time on the board.

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

Giving back to this team, which has given me so much.

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I'm pretty much an open book but I guess one fun fact is that I write a lot of popular fanfiction under a pen name.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBER

## Facilities and Equipment Coordinator Isaac Trumbo



**How long have you been a member of WH2O? Is this your first time on the board?**

I joined the team in July 2018, first time on the board!

**What are you looking forward to about being on the board?**

Looking forward to serving WH2O aquatics and getting to know every member. Also looking forward to working with the different pool and facilities directors around L.A.

**What's a fun fact about you that people might not know?**

I have a twin brother, younger brother and two sisters who are all swimmers! My dad was a pro basketball player but preferred that we swam since it is easier on the back.

# LA JOLLA COVE RELAY

*By Stephanie Saisi*

The 19th Annual La Jolla Cove 10-Mile Relay was held on September 26th, 2021 – and WH2O had a remarkable turnout for our first time attending the event as a team. We sent four full teams of five to compete in the combined age categories and had some noteworthy performances. At its core, the relay is a fundraiser staffed entirely by volunteers and where all proceeds go toward the American Diabetes Association and the Prevent Drowning Foundation of San Diego. The atmosphere and energy of the event is one of its selling points, with constant cheering at the water's edge and teammates giving high fives to signify a relay exchange.

The day kicked off early with participants gathering before sunrise at La Jolla Shores. At 7:00am, our lead swimmers (Carlo Morante - Rainbows, Caroline Britt - Unicorns, Stephanie Saisi - Butterflies, and Irene Wong - Sunshine) tackled the chaos of a foggy start line and navigated a course that is perhaps best-described as... funnel-shaped. For the next three miles, Keely MacDonald, Julia Ticus, and Liz Vucinich held things down for WeHo Rainbows; Deb Jourdain, Geoff Stier, and Audrey Kim rep'd the Unicorns; Sully, Igor Porciuncula and Tia Maggini for the Butterflies; and Andrew Browning, Mike Wallace, and Suzanne Porush for Sunshine.



In the last few yards of the final mile, Jack Sinclair (WeHo Unicorns) caught Jeff Peterson (WeHo Rainbows) to finish in 4:03:35 and place 8th overall out of 133 teams! Wow! The Rainbows were right behind, coming in at 4:03:40 and securing 9th place. Anchored by Chris Olivares, WeHo Butterflies followed at 4:35:40 for 45th place and David Kirvan from WeHo Sunshine rounded out the West Hollywood debut with a majestic finish at 5:13:20.

Although the sun refused to make an appearance, action at the beach continued to pick up throughout the morning – and with surfers, kayakers, and divers also enjoying the waters nearby, it looked like a scene out of a movie! Despite the cloudy skies, the water was clear, and we enjoyed spotting marine life and even being startled by the bubbles of scuba divers down below. We hope to represent WH2O again in the future and will keep our fingers crossed for sunshine in 2022.

Big shout-out to the incredible Irene Wong for all her help and guidance in getting this off the ground – we can't wait for next year!



# BOB NEALY MEMORIAL CUP *Water Polo Tournament Recap by Mike Crosby*



WH2O water polo competed in the 5th annual [Bob Nealy Memorial Cup](#) (WH2O has competed all 5 years) hosted by Los Angeles Athletic Club (LAAC). Many of the best water polo players in the country competed in the elite "open" division (10 teams) or the women's division (8 teams) that WH2O's Lacey Rainwater played in, representing LAAC. WH2O elected the slightly-less-so-but-still-very-competitive "classic" division (7 teams).

We played 4 games, winning a key game Saturday evening to advance to the final four in our division, but unfortunately lost both games yesterday to finish 4th place. Still, for the first tournament in almost 2 years, many players seemed in very good spirits, happy to be competing again, and extremely eager to train hard at practice, work on our weaknesses, and compete more in 2022, including Palm Springs IGLA coming up in April. In addition to 12 WH2O veterans, we had 6 players represent our team for the first time in a tournament: David Correa, Dan Hekman, Jim Gillis, Brian Breiter, Alexis Reyes, and Yegor Novikov. I hope it will be the first of many :-).

# CREATIVE CORNER

*Featuring Edward Wardrip*

## **1) How did you get into editing?**

I actually thought I wanted to go into law, but I took a yearlong documentary class my senior year. Each team was assigned an organization to work with, and our team was assigned this brilliant young mom who grew up in Bed-Stuy staring at an ugly vacant lot filled with trash her whole life. She gathered her community together and was able to turn that trash-filled vacant lot into a community garden. We documented the garden coming together, and I took up the reins editing our little story. The professor said I had a natural talent for it, so I just decided then and there to change career paths. It was pretty impulsive and possibly stupid on my part.

## **2) What is your favorite project you have worked on?**

My favorite project was probably "Spielberg." I got to work under an incredibly talented editor, and because this was a documentary about Steven Spielberg, I watched all of his films dozens of times over. At first I (rather pretentiously) thought that Spielberg was just a big box office guy with no real art to his craft, but the more I dissected his films, it became incredibly clear how brilliant he is as a filmmaker. Being so close to his work was really a master class in filmmaking.



### 3) What do you love about editing?

I mostly work in documentaries, so a lot of the structure of the film is decided in the edit, unlike say a scripted feature where the story is already written out, and I love crafting a story from nothing. It feels like assembling lego blocks into some grand structure.

### 4) What's something you've watched recently that you really appreciated and why?

“Sex Education.” It's rad to see a whole milieu of sexualities and genders that actually get handled with care and depth. Every single character on that show (except Otis who objectively sucks) has been given such great complexity. The show simultaneously makes me root for every single character without it feeling smarmy or preachy. It strikes a perfect balance, and it somehow gets better every season.

## NEW MERCH!!!



*Designed by  
WH2O's own  
Sammy Binkow.  
Get yours on  
[www.wh2o.org](http://www.wh2o.org)*



# And the Winner is...



Volunteer of the Year  
Chris Gibson

Volunteer Notable Mentions  
Angel Fund: Audrey Kim and  
Liz Vucinich  
IGLA Rep: Mike Wallace  
Newsletter: Errol Graham  
WH2Ocean: Stephanie Saisi

President's Award  
James Carameta

WH2O Spirit Award  
James Carameta

Swimming  
Most Improved: Anastasia Kurteeva;  
William (Jon) Quinlan  
Favorite Lanemate: Jon Garrison; Daniel Banchik  
Hardest Worker: Caroline Britt; Stephanie Saisi  
Swimmer of the Year: Anastasia Kurteeva

Water Polo  
Most Improved: Dan Hekman  
Favorite Passing Buddy: Edward Wardrip  
Tom Martinez Award: Theo Bass  
MVP: Jason Braun

2021 Open Water Awards  
Most Improved: Elizabeth (Liz) Vucinich  
Hardest Worker: Geoffrey (Geoff) Stier  
Favorite Draft Buddy: Irene Wong  
Open Water Swimmer of the Year: Stephanie Saisi

# Swimming Across Santa Monica Bay by Carly Miller

Since I first began marathon swimming in 2017, all of the swims that I've chosen to do are emotionally significant to me for some reason and are dedicated to certain people. I consider the Santa Monica Bay to be my home water and I have swum almost every portion of the coastline from Malibu to PV over the last few years. So it only made sense to do the whole thing. That is, if you think swimming 27 miles in the ocean through the dead of night makes sense.

This swim, a dream in the making of mine for about 2 years, had only been done 5 times before. Amy Gubser was the third person to complete the swim; she is a mentor for me in this sport and was instrumental on my crew and in getting me through this swim. In fact, for this swim, I assembled the most experienced crew of any swim I had ever done. And they were all key in helping me get through the swim.

As I had done since 2017, I used the swim as a fundraiser for FORCE (Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered), the organization I volunteer with which focuses on helping families facing hereditary cancer. I always swim to honor my mother, who passed away in 2005 from ovarian cancer. This year, I wanted to also dedicate my swim to my dear friends Scott Goldberg and Dan Simonelli, who were battling cancer (Scott has since passed away but did get to see me finish the swim). And Dan paddled next to me during the sunrise kayak shift.

Planning for the swim meant securing the date, boat, crew, but also training. My training was really intense in June, July and August with a lot of long back to back swims (6 hr/6 hr, 6 hr/4 hr, 6 hr/4 hr), a 7 and a 9 hour swim, lots of big volume weeks (30-40 mi). Fast Forward to the afternoon of September 21st. As we were making our way up from San Pedro to northern Malibu on the boat, I knew conditions would be challenging. It was windy as hell and the closer we got to Point Dume, the more rocking the boat did. I wondered how the fuck I got myself into this situation.

As we approached Point Dume and Pirate's Cove, I prepared to get into the water as the boat crew got the kayaks launched. The water was MOVING. The boat was being blown all over the place. I could feel the adrenaline blasting through my veins. I watched Amy dive into the water (she had agreed to start the swim with me). I jumped in behind her and made my way to shore at Pirate's Cove. Waves, current, swell, rocks. I had to navigate it all just swimming a few hundred yards into shore.

After clearing the water and collecting myself, I exchanged a few words with Amy and gave the start signal to my observer on land on the cliffs above. She was connected via radio to my observers on the boat. You see, up there, the big boats can't get too close to shore. It's way too dangerous with all the rocks. Someone needs to observe the start and announce the time the swimmer walks into the water, signifying the official start of the swim.

My mind was racing as I entered the ocean and for the next hour or so, it was a struggle to figure out the positioning of myself as the swimmer, the kayakers and the boat. I breathe mainly to the left and was sandwiched in between the boat and the kayaks, but felt like I was too close, unsafely close, to the boat in a swell of that size. At one point, I breathed right and it honestly looked like the boat was going to run me over. It looked about 2 feet away from my face. I commented to my kayaker that I was terrified of the boat being so close. Then, I saw the boat slowly reposition. It was clear they were trying to protect me from the swell, but that wasn't really working.

The swell got bigger as the later evening hours approached and I'd say it was about 3-5 feet for most of the night. I could clearly see waves breaking over Danny's shoulder in the kayak and I felt like I was disappearing under the water in rhythm with the swell. After several hours, it became clear to me that this wasn't going to die down much until probably just before sunrise. I just had to accept it.

For the next 8-9 hours, I had a very strong urge to quit. What was I doing? I didn't think I could swim for 20 hours (which is the max time I thought the swim could take me) and the conditions were worsening. But, I knew I was being pushed in the right direction so I tried not to get agitated. Agitation with conditions is something I've experienced on previous swims and I've been working on my mental game to cut down on that. Even though I was having all kinds of doubts and negative thoughts, I just kept swimming. And even though I wanted to quit, I didn't. When it got really hard, I tried to remember those I was there honoring. And I tried to just think about swimming to the next feed.

I would go on to battle stomach issues, including nausea and vomiting, for the remainder of the swim. The nausea was so bad that I didn't want to consume anything other than water but was soon provided with a concoction of tea, honey and electrolytes developed by my crew. It was warm liquid and was going down OK. I was still nauseous but it wasn't getting worse so I kept swimming. I held it together and tried not to complain.

Eventually, the sun began to rise and soon, it would be fully up. I could feel the air and water warming. I struggled with my own body temperature more so on this swim than ever before. I think that was simply due to taking in such little nutrition. While I felt cold during most of the swim, I knew I was not hypothermic and my brain was functioning as normally as possible at this point. I was uncomfortable, but not in danger. At the next feed, I was told I had somewhere around 2 hours left.

I was still battling stomach issues, but knowing I had fewer hours left than expected boosted my confidence big time. Also, the sun was out and it was a gorgeous day. I could see PV getting closer, and started getting lots of encouragement from Danny in the kayak and my friend Jim support swimming next to me (you're allowed a support swimmer for 1 hour at a time).

As we passed the R10 PV buoy, one of the sea lions sunning on the buoy dove into the water and was repeatedly swooping very close to me. I heard dolphins a lot during the last few hours of the swim; I couldn't see them, but my crew could. As I continued to swim, I could see the swimmers on my crew on the deck of the boat - Linda, Amy, Jim and Danny, getting their swim gear on and getting ready to hop in the water. Before I knew it, we were in the kelp. After a few more minutes, Rocky Point was ahead.

The swell was ebbing and flowing and rocks were hidden and being exposed with the movement of the swell. I soon realized that I was in very shallow water with jagged rocks underneath me. I turned and there was literally a set of 3-5 foot waves coming in, one after the next after the next. I remember thinking how nuts this was as I was getting slammed repeatedly into the jagged rocks. By this time, I could tell I was bleeding and that my legs were cut up. Finally, after what seemed like a few minutes, I made my way to the rock my crew was sending me to and was able to stand up with my hands up over my head for a few seconds to officially finish the swim and stop the time. The scars on my feet will always be a reminder of this finish.

Finishing a swim is always bittersweet. It's a huge goal that you're focused on for a really long time. I always feel a bit sad when it's over, especially being so emotionally invested in it. In completing the swim, I became the 6th person to ever do so. Paperwork, videos and pictures have been submitted to Marathon Swimmers Federation for ratification. I was able to raise almost \$10,000 for FORCE.

\*\*If you'd like to learn more about FORCE, you can visit [www.facingourrisk.org](http://www.facingourrisk.org) \*\*\*If you'd like to donate to my fundraiser, you can visit <https://teamforce.facingourrisk.org/fundraiser/3414524>

