

David the Denver Firefighter

You may not know this, but when your swimmer became a member of a USA Swimming team, you became a member of an international renowned support organization. You are now a member of an elite group that is envied by every other Olympic sport in the world. And it doesn't hurt that this group is attached to the most watched Olympic sport of the Summer Games - the one sport of the Summer Games that contributes the most medals to the US medal count. The elite group I am talking about is the volunteers that make USA Swimming activities run so well. The NGB's (National Governing Bodies) of other Olympic sports come to USA Swimming to study how they are so successful in running their national program only with volunteers. And that volunteer structure runs all the way up to the top – to the President of USA Swimming.

For swim meets, it starts at the grass roots level with each swim club and goes all the way up to the Olympic Trials every four years that picks the swimmers who represent the United States in the Olympic Games. All those people helping to put on all those swim meets are volunteers, even at Olympic Trials. At Trials, the National Guard provides volunteers for security at the venue; it is volunteers who are responsible for all the organizational issues – and that is a huge amount of people; even the officials running the deck are volunteers. At that 10-day event, every person working at that meet (outside of the media) is a volunteer.

Every now and then, you run across a volunteer in our sport of swimming that is the epitome of the word “volunteer”. At the ACES Swim Club, we have been lucky to have a few of those. One such volunteer is Marc Nankey who has done so much for the running of our meets, for keeping our equipment in good condition, and handling the giant maintenance issues at our outdoor pool at Lowry. Many, many thanks to Marc for all the help he has given to ACES over the years. Now we have a new volunteer of Marc's caliber and this story is about him.

Once upon a time, there was a Denver Firefighter named David whose daughter wanted to join a year-round swim team. He supported her efforts and she joined the ACES Swim Club. As the team size is about 400 swimmers, during the winter, ACES practices at multiple facilities: Arapahoe High School, Heritage High School, Littleton High School, Cherry Creek High School, and Cherokee Trail High School. In the summer, the team uses their outdoor pool at Lowry. The

summer pool adds an additional challenge to the team because the swim club is responsible for the maintenance of the pool.

David, the Denver Firefighter, is not the kind of person who can sit on the sidelines and just watch when there is work to be done. He wanted to do something to help support this swim team that was doing such good things for his daughter. Sitting in the stands as a spectator and trying to stay occupied while waiting for his daughter's swims was driving him crazy. So David started looking around to see if there was something he could do to help the team.

David, the Denver Firefighter, brought his daughter to practice in the summer and watched what was going on at the Lowry facility. One of the coaches and Marc Nankey were always working to keep the area and pool equipment in good working order. It is quite a daunting task to maintain the pump room, the pool, the bathroom, the concessions building, etc. The boiler to heat the pool water needed to be replaced. The hot water heater for the showers in the bath house needed to be replaced. David could see that there was a need for more hands to help out.

Another thing that David saw Marc Nankey doing (besides helping with pool maintenance) was running the computer software at the meets. That gave him another idea. David decided he wanted to do even more to help out the team. So he hooked up with Marc to try and learn everything that Marc knew. He became the apprentice and turned himself into a sponge for learning. And that is exactly what David did; he learned everything that he could. Lucky for David, Marc knew a lot, being an engineer along with someone who had learned everything about the software used to run a swim meet. David now could run the software at the meets, both winter and summer, and also help out with the facilities maintenance when the team ran their operations at the outdoor Lowry pool.

David had one other capability that he did not realize he was bringing to the team, but the Meet Referee was very cognizant of David's value. As a firefighter, David has emergency medical training. When anything happens at a swim meet that requires medical attention, David is the person the Meet Referee relies on to determine the seriousness of the issue and what action needs to be taken. David, the Denver Firefighter, has become a very valuable asset to the successful running of the ACES Swim Club. And we are incredibly lucky to have someone like him associated with our team.

Outside of the coaches, who are paid to do their jobs, everyone else involved in supporting swimming is a volunteer. Swim teams cannot survive without their volunteers. So when you are doing one of the following:

- working in concessions or being a timer for your 2-hour shift
- helping clean up during a session
- working the timing system console, or being the announcer, or running the meet software for a session
- or whatever volunteer position you choose to do

you not only are paying back this sport for the life lessons this sport helps your swimmer learn (being water safe; developing great organizational, commitment, and long-term goal setting skills; and understanding what it takes to succeed, even in the face of adversity), but you are part of a world renowned elite group that supports the highest ranked United States medaling sport in the Summer Olympic Games. You are a swim team volunteer, just like David Feilmeier, the Denver Firefighter.