

Meet NC Swimmer Karen Kemerait

A Triathlete, a Swimmer, an Attorney

By Harry DeLong

This is the third in a series on swimmers in RAM, two of whom are relatively unknown to the wider North Carolina swimming community. OK, Karen is the second of two attorneys in a row. No, I'm not in trouble and think writing about attorneys will result in my receiving legal aid. Karen is like so many other swimmers in our swim group: she has her life outside swimming, comes to practice, contributes, but is not well known throughout the state in swimming circles since she only competes in one swim meet a year. She has made a decision that family and career are more important to her than being well known in swimming circles outside of RAM. I suspect we all know others who satisfy that description. Karen is pictured above as she received her award for winning her age group in the White Lake Triathlon 2011. As expected, swimming contributed well to that victory.



Karen grew up about as close to water as possible and still remained fairly dry. She is originally from Cocoa Beach, Florida, and she attended high school in Satellite Beach, Florida (which is about 10 miles south of Cocoa Beach). As a kid, she swam for The Rockledge-Cocoa Swim Team (ROCOA), and she also swam for her high school swim team. Unfortunately for swimming, she decided to stop swimming when she graduated from high school. Also like many, Karen stopped with a vengeance, or so she thought, as she was ready to focus on a sport other than swimming. She left Florida for college at Davidson College, where she majored in English. While at Davidson, she ran Cross Country and Track (competing in 5K events), and she was captain of the Cross Country and Track teams. She received the most valuable Cross Country runner award her senior year.

After graduating with a BA in English in 1988, she attended Law School at Wake Forest University, where she graduated in 1991. After law school, Karen clerked for Judge Elizabeth G. McCrodden with the North Carolina Court of Appeals. In 2004, Karen joined Blanchard, Miller, Lewis & Styers. She now practices with the law firm of Styers & Kemerait. Yes, that's her name after the "&". She is one of the partners of the firm. Her practice focuses on land use, regulatory work before the Utilities Commission, and various types of litigation. Karen has practiced and argued before the North Carolina Supreme Court, the North Carolina Court of Appeals, the North Carolina Industrial Commission, and the North Carolina Utilities Commission. In addition she is a volunteer for and has served as the attorney for the Wake County Guardian ad Litem program, which represents the interests of abused and neglected children.

Away from work, Karen has three boys, ages 14 (John), 9 (Owen) and 8 (Carson), and they are all involved in sports. The oldest son is on his high school cross country team, plays soccer and swims on his high school swim team. The two younger sons play soccer and basketball, and they are swimming for the local Marlins of Raleigh swim team. Their favorite strokes are freestyle and breaststroke (Owen) and backstroke (Carson).

Karen wants to see her kids develop a true love of sports that will stay with them throughout their lives. According to Karen, it doesn't matter which sport they are involved with, it's just important they develop a passion for the sport. She spends a considerable amount of time taking the boys to practices and ensuring homework is done.

So what about Karen and swimming, what got her back into the water? Despite the fear that Masters would be full of really fast swimmers, would be too much for a returning swimmer, and would be like her old age group in pressure and intensity, she nonetheless decided to start swimming again with Masters. The latter she did not want. As expected, and as many have found, Masters is different and you can return at your level and work your way toward improving fitness and skill. Still it took her interest in triathlons to get her back in the pool. When she started doing triathlons, she has already had the running and swimming backgrounds, but she didn't have much of a biking background. Well, let's not let a little thing about two wheels get in the way. About six years ago, she decided to do her first triathlon in Wilmington. Her "training" was to keep up her running and add a couple of days in the water at the local "Y". She didn't feel she had time for biking and, as biking seemed to be so easy, she learned how to ride her bike again as she rode about a mile from the hotel to the start of the race. Amazingly, she finished, and also learned that cycling isn't that easy. Recognizing she really did need to train better for these events, she found some good friends to help her, like Nicole Silvernail, RAM Treasurer. Nicole also is a good swimming partner and finally convinced her to join RAM for swim training. She tried it, liked it, and is still swimming.

Karen now competes in marathon runs, triathlon events and swimming competition. She is no longer in the burned out mode on swimming and seems to thoroughly enjoy the practices. She prefers morning practices so she can go to work after practice and still be home to be Mom to her kids. An interesting side light is this November she experiences a new phase of swimming. Her oldest son will be swimming for his high school team which happens to do its practices at the same pool and time as her Masters practices. As for swim competition, Karen seems to like distances of 1,650 (Hurrah!), 200 Free, 100 Breaststroke and the 200 IM. Oh, about those 200IM's. Karen discovered at her first Masters swim meet that swimming a 200IM is a lot harder than what she remembered as a kid. Where have I heard that before? Karen definitely plans to swim at the 2012 SCY Nationals in Greensboro so expect to see her in meets between now and then. You've got to like her attitude, she is planning on the 1650 or the 1000 at the Nationals meet. She also has a May 2012 goal to complete a bike ride called, "Assault on Mount Mitchell", a tough and long distance mountain bike ride.

Her ultimate goal is a full Iron Man event, but right now that's on hold because she feels that her main focus should remain on her three sons and work.

So if you are at a swim meet, a run, or a triathlon and bump into her, say hello and be prepared to enjoy the experience of meeting her. Karen is a people person and a pleasure to be around.