

## AT LIBERTY TO SWIM

*By Jon Blank*

New types of athletic events have sprung up in the past few years, events that enhance the social and charitable aspects of fitness training. Rather than just slogging through solo workouts, many now enroll in team participation or marquee events that are both challenging and fun. Examples include Swim Across America, or the color-bomb road races and military-type obstacle courses which have exploded in popularity since introduction just a few years ago. Last month, we featured the Triangle Indoor Water Festival, which will raise funds for cancer research as part of Swim Across America on September 21.



Today, we'll highlight another event, one of several sponsored by NY Swim. Pollution of our nation's waterways has been of concern since the 1970s. When Lake Erie caught on fire in 1969, it ignited public awareness of water pollution. The 1987 "Syringe Tide", when a 50 mile stretch of the Jersey Shore was awash in medical waste and hazardous materials, injected New Yorkers to think about their harbors and beaches. NY Swim is one of many community nonprofits promoting improved water quality. Our nation's waters have improved a great deal since the Clean Water Act was imposed in 1975, but industrial areas and population-dense waterways are still at risk.



The daunting prospect of jumping into New York Harbor may still deter some, but not NC Masters swimmer Tom Beck. He recently took part in the 2013 Statue of Liberty Island Swim, the only participant from North Carolina to do so. Despite caveats cited on the NY Swim website, such as "shipping traffic...random jetsam & flotsam", and a caution that raw sewage overflow conditions might cancel the event, Tom plunged ahead. He heeded the website, "we recommend that all swimmers have up-to-date tetanus shots, and that they be vaccinated against Hepatitis A". Tom was also aware of the helpful information, "swimming in water that is compromised increases the chances of developing a bacterial infection, and it would be our recommendation that swimmers begin a course of antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin immediately after the swim".

But, enough negativity. Let's hear Tom's own words: "My family planned a whole vacation around this swim, which I decided would be fun. I did get lots of warnings from a multitude of people who said I should not do the swim because of the pollution and debris in the water. I did find the water to be a little oily, but beyond that, it looked and tasted the same as all the other water.

The staff and volunteers were all amazing... I had the chance to get to know some of the other competitors. When you breathed to your right, you saw the setting sun over NYC, when you breathed left, you saw Lady Liberty lit up. What could be better than that?

The experience of the swim was absolutely amazing...being on Liberty Island after hours, seeing the city of New York from that angle. They offer a BBQ for the swimmers and their guests to enjoy after the swim, so that you can relish the whole experience of being on the island."