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gifts stacked on the kickboard as part of their holiday display. They push the limits of gravity so they get as many style points as possible (and it doesn't hurt that their legions of fans avidly follow their exploits on social media). "It takes years to build our buff bods," says Parker. "The amount of hay, pellets and lettuce that goes into maintaining our svelte pelts requires that we keep our public engaged so our sponsors stay happy."

Clearly, the long hours of practice, strict adherence to nutritional excellence and the self control needed not to eat team-mates paid off, because this relay was the closest race in recent memory. Both teams traded the lead back and forth until the last 100, when spectators could visibly see each of the athletes dig deep to pull on reserves they didn't know they had, all for the glory of winning the Golden Snowflake. Fans were on their feet screaming as both teams closed on the wall and claws and paws strained to be the first to hit the touch pad for the win. No one predicted that the most anticipated event of 2024 would end in a tie!

There was a moment of stunned silence, then pandemonium ensued as all the swimmers from both teams erupted in giant splashes, fist bumps and back slaps to celebrate.

Legendary Coach Shares Motivating Swim Secrets

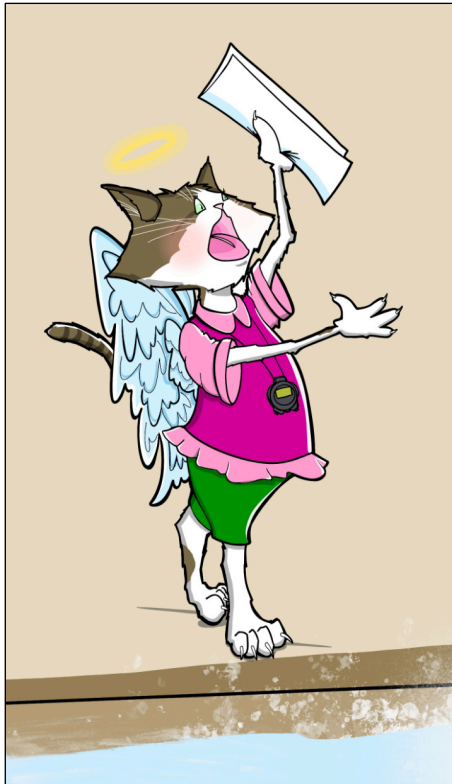
High Expectations & Heat Sheet Waving Strategies

Coach Betty estimates that she walks/runs about ten miles during each meet, as she paces the pool deck keeping up with each of her swimmers. Her team teases her that without her running alongside, shooping them along with her heat sheet, that they would only go half as fast.

A swimmer who prefers not to be named has said that they secretly measured her deafening two finger "Race Whistle™" and the the decibel meter reading was equivalent to a police siren in a small space. "Let me tell you, hearing that shrill whistle is both highly motivating and slightly horrifying, because it generally means that you need to pick up your pace even if you're swimming full out and don't think you have anything more to give."

"Coach Betty is tough but fair," adds another swimmer. "She expects you to bring your best every time you're in the water." She is famously quoted as saying 'excuses are lies' so her swimmers own their behavior in and out of the water and 'Don't let the tinsel drag you down' to keep her somewhat eclectic group of athletes goal focussed and performance driven. "Otherwise it could devolve into cat fights and a dog-eat-dog

world," says Coach Betty, "and we certainly don't want that. Every one of these athletes is a champion, and I'm so proud to play a part in their success."



PEACE, LOVE AND JOY
Annmarie, Mark, James, Henry, Charlotte
and our entire furry family!

**Kathlene Frances Hoover The Brave
a.k.a. Katie**
Fostered and adopted, SPCA of Westchester
Briarcliff, New York
2012

**Primrose Pumpkin Spice Latte
a.k.a. Rosie**
Adopted through SPCA of Westchester
Briarcliff, New York
2015

**Walter Aloysius "T Top"
and Daniel Boone**
Rescued from Stone Barns Farm via
Reinemarie Willimann, DVM
2017

Marcus and Parker
Private guinea pig adoption
Waxhaw, North Carolina
2023

Please welcome our new friend:

**Theodore Sebastian Alexander a.k.a.
Theo**
Adopted through Charlotte Mecklenburg
Animal Care and Control
Charlotte, North Carolina
2024

Rest in Peace
**Percilonius Augustus Felonius
Bolognius Maximus, a.k.a. Percy**
Adopted through SPCA of Westchester
Briarcliff, New York
2009 - 2024
(16-1/2 Years Old)

**Señorita Bettina Louisa Rosita Santa
Maria, a.k.a. Betty**
Adopted through Veterinary Care of Mt.
Pleasant, Reinemarie Willimann, DVM
Pleasantville, New York
2014 - 2024
(17 Years Old)

The Anntics Aquatic Times

VOL. XXVI WAXHAW, NORTH CAROLINA, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2024 FREE



Swimmers from all species gather in Charlotte, NC for winter games.

REINDEER GAMES COMING TO TOWN

Mixed Species Compete for
Golden Snowflake Medal

In a stunning announcement that has shocked the swimming world, organizers are putting together a Holiday swim meet that takes elite swimmers from different species, sizes and fur types and divides them into relay teams to compete at this year's Reindeer Games. The winning team will earn the coveted Golden Snowflake medal and bragging rights from the North Pole to the South Pole. "It's unprecedented to have swimmers who traditionally compete against each other now work together as a cohesive unit. What's most exciting for me is to see how these [newly formed] teams overcome some glaringly obvious challenges to focus on bringing home the Golden Snowflake," says Green Coach Percilonius Felonius Bolognius Maximus. (Coach Percy to his swimmers.)

"I'm going to stress explosive starts, quick turns and a strong finish," says Red Coach

Bettina Lousia Rosita Santa Maria. When asked specifically about her strategy, Coach Betty gets a twinkle in her eye and says, "I'll see them when they're sleeping, I'll know when they're awake, I'll know if they've been bad or good, so they had better be good for goodness sake. Otherwise, I'll have them bang out a race pace fifteen hundred while dragging fully loaded sleighs at the end of practice."

In order to insure safety for all participants, the 'Team-mates Don't Eat Team-mates' policy will be strictly enforced. In an interview, two of the smallest competitors, Guinea Pigs Marcus and Parker, are quick to tell reporters that they are completely comfortable with the astonishing size difference between them and the largest swimmer, who weighs in at a whopping 82 pounds. "People underestimate us," says Parker. "We're cute and look great in a speedo, but we've been training for this our whole lives."

Don't miss the action! Catch the Reindeer Games live this Saturday—where fur, fins, and fun meet in the pool!

The Torch is Passed

During a touching ceremony before the games, Coach Percy bestowed a special honor upon the newest recruit to the team. Theodore Sebastian Alexander was fighting back tears as Percy praised his athleticism, shockingly loud motivational yowls and his deep love for his team. "I would do anything for them", Theo says. "I'm in high demand as a snuggler and am famous for my head butts."

An anonymous member of the team jokingly adds that Theo's speedy exits from the litter box are also legendary.

In an emotional exchange, Coach Percy shared that this would be his last Games in an official capacity, but that he would always be present in spirit. "I hope that I am leaving the team stronger and more resilient, and that each swimmer knows that they can do great things if they believe in themselves the way I believe in them."

"I think Theo is the perfect cat for the position of new head coach. He's the real deal," Percy says.

Theo didn't always have it easy. There have been rumors of time in the shelter, an unfortunate run in with a car, some challenging physical issues, and a recent discovery that Theo is deaf in both ears. None of that can dampen Theo's work ethic or zest for life. "If there's an obstacle in my way, I just jump on top of it and knock stuff off," he says. Theo's life experience and his unique role both as a swimmer and now as a coach will ensure that the Reindeer Relays remain one of the premier events in the sport.





Red Team Prepared to Make a Splash

Doggy Paddle Champ, Fearless Feline, and Rowdy Rodents Make Waves

Not to be outdone in the quest for aquatic supremacy, Coach Betty's Red Team has an eclectic but cohesive team that is poised for greatness. Reigning doggy paddle champion, Katie, has been paired with fearless feline Theo and the Rowdy Rodent duo of guinea pigs Marcus and Parker. "Honestly, we spend a lot of time laughing and jokingly pretending to chase each other," says Theo.

Katie has grown into her role as doggy paddle star over many years of practice and breakout swims at key qualifying meets. Her favorite aspect of swimming is the ability to eat vast quantities of food in the name of fueling. Although her body is a temple, she occasionally cheats with beef cheek chews and stolen enchiladas and almond butter sandwiches.

When asked about her team dynamics, Kate is quick to praise her team-mates' strengths and work ethic. "We push each other to be the best we can. From dryland to demanding double practices, we hold each other

accountable and work hard and play hard." When not at practice, the exceptionally talented foursome can be found indulging at the local maestros of frozen confectionery goodness, Tom and Jerry's Ice Cream or at Cavy, a mediterranean restaurant that caters to vegetarians like Parker and Marcus, but also has offerings for the obligate carnivores (Theo) and omnivores (Katie), alike. "Clearly, we bond over our love of food as well as swim," Parker laughs as he munches a post practice carrot.



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2024

Bitter Rivals Find Common Ground in and out of Pool

Tears flowed freely when the Relay's esteemed coaches, Betty and Percy, were honored with lifetime achievement awards for their years of tireless dedication to the sport. Percy, at sixteen and half years old, has literally dedicated his life to shaping the minds and bodies of some of the world's top swimmers.

Seventeen year old Betty overcame almost incapacitating shyness to shine as one of the brightest lights in international swimming.

While both coaches are well known to be bitter rivals on the pool deck, outside the natatorium they can be found swapping grueling practice sets and dreaming up training trip itineraries in exotic locales.



Butterfly Dreams and Floatie Schemes

Meet the Unlikely Green Team All-Stars of the Upcoming Reindeer Relays

One of the unique aspects of the Reindeer Relays are the team assignments. At first glance, observers are hard pressed to see the rationale behind the lineups, but officials are quick to point out that each team was carefully structured to balance strength, speed, style and ability.

Take for example, the Green Team. Rosie the Rottweiler x pittie mix weighs in at 82 pounds and would consider herself a reluctant wader, at best. "I feel like I didn't get the doggy paddle down when I was a puppy, and have never felt really secure in anything deeper than a puddle. Truthfully, I'm happiest getting my cardio in by running after deer and digging for moles," Rosie shares.

It wasn't until Coach Percy saw me chasing a butterfly one day that he pulled me aside and told me that I was wasting my talents sleeping on the floor and sniffing out rabbits in the backyard. "He set me on a journey that took me from chasing butterflies to actually learning the butterfly stroke. He's kind of traditional about wanting his swimmers to be proficient as IMers, but once he saw how embarrassing my doggy paddle was, he was willing to let me specialize," says the elite swimmer. Rosie has repaid Percy's kindness by being a leader in and out of the water. "I want to give back, and make the world a better place. Before I started training for the relays, I read to children as part of school literacy programs, and helped children who were afraid of dogs learn to trust again."

Feline brothers Walter and Daniel have an

equally compelling story. Bottle fed as young orphans after a tragic farm accident took their mother's life, their rough start didn't diminish their playfulness or sense of mischief. From an early age, the brothers drank from running faucets, jumped in showers and generally splashed up a storm wherever they could. In a prank that even seven years later is considered epic, they somehow managed to turn the tub filler on and completely flooded the bathroom in a previous residence.

If Daniel seems most at home in the water, it's because he became aquatically proficient in order to insure his beloved sibling Walter's

safety. Walter has epilepsy and is under a vet's care, but there have been times that Daniel has had to rescue him from the sink during a seizure. Since the Reindeer Games are inclusive, Walter has specially engineered flotation devices including a rubber wreath rescue ring, FINA approved life preserver and hi-tech arm floaties, as well as his loyal brother by his side.

Rosie provides the speed for the team; Walter provides the style; and Daniel brings up the rear with fast flippers and a jaunty flag on his tail.

'PIGDEMONIUM' ERUPTS AT ANNUAL RELAY

The venue was packed with every furred and feathered spectator, who all voiced their support at top volume before the start of the historic short course duel between two of the world's best relay teams. In a twist on typical relay rules, the Reindeer Relay requires the lead swimmer to complete a 50 in the stroke of their choice, and each subsequent swimmer to jump on or in the race as the lead swimmer pulls away from the wall.

"Relay starts can be tricky to coordinate, but jumping precisely at the right moment to land exactly on target so you don't sink your team-mates or get tangled in the lights and decorations brings a new new level of pressure!" exclaims Marcus the Guinea Pig. Both he and his brother/training partner, Parker, have been working on their core strength to stay precisely balanced on the

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