

## Ready to Walk the Hall: Jan Jones? love for swimming never defined her, but shaped her



Growing up in Winnipeg, Man., Janice Jones enrolled in swimming initially not for the love or the interest of it, but rather for safety.

?I started out learning to swim because it was a safety issue, basically,? Jones told The Auroran. ?I think it's really important that every Canadian learns to swim. We live in area that has lots of lakes. It's just a safety issue?to learn to save yourself if you're ever in that situation. It's a skill that every child needs.?

As she took lessons, Jones never really thought about how good she was.

?I can't say that I was a great swimmer to start with. I found the water cold,? Jones joked.

She took her lessons and eventually, joined competitive swimming. She also trained to be a lifeguard at the same time.

Her first major competition arose in 1956.

It was the Olympic trials and it took place in Toronto.

Jones took a two-and-a-half-day train ride to the city and competed in an outdoor pool at Christie Pits ? now known as Alex Duff Memorial Pool.

From that point onward Jones competed in competitions in Minnesota to improve and eventually in 1958, made her way to Vancouver for the Junior Nationals to finish second in the 100-metre breaststroke. She was then offered an invitation to compete in a Commonwealth Games ?Swim off? where she was just seven-tenths of a second off the fastest time in the country.

In 1959, Jones placed second in the 100-metre breaststroke at the National Championships in Brantford, Ont.

She was then offered the opportunity to stay in Toronto and train with the renowned EMAC swim club.

With expert coaching and a competitive environment, she was able to place first at the Pan American Games trials, setting a new Canadian record. This earned her a spot on the relay team that placed second at the Pan American Games.

After 1960, Jones took a long hiatus from swimming

In 1973, she and her family moved to Aurora and got involved in the sporting community. In 1976, she, along with a few friends, started the Aurora Ladies Volleyball league which remained active for several decades.

After taking a teaching position at the only school in York Region with a swimming pool she decided to start coaching. In 1986, she started the York Region High School Swimming conference and coached winning teams for 14 years. In 1997 she was awarded the Ontario School Athletic Association Leadership in School Sport for her work as a coach.

After 31 years of being away from competitive swimming, Jones decided to return to the pool.

One of the coaches from another school, convinced her to join Masters Swimming. At the time Aurora had no facility to train in. She joined the York Orcas who trained out of Newmarket and the technique, quickly came back to me. I was a better swimmer now as I understood stroke mechanics and was much better at visualization and mental prep. In a lot of ways Masters swimming is more difficult as you have other responsibilities in life.?

In 1991, at her first National Masters competition, she placed first in three breaststroke events- the 50, 100 and 200-metre.

In 1992, she broke the Canadian record for her age group in all three events and set an Ontario record in the 100-metre individual medley. At the IV FINA World Masters Swimming Championships that year she brought home a bronze medal for Canada.

In 1993, at the Canadian Masters Swimming Championships, she placed first in six separate events, and went on to place second in 1994 at the V FINA World Masters Swimming Championships in Montreal.

Masters Swimming is quite competitive and at this meet there were 4,000 competitors from 41 countries competing in various events.

She continued to coach up until 2002 before she retired and hung up the goggles.

In retirement, Jones ? who keeps herself active riding her bicycle and with hiking and walking groups ? was completely surprised when she discovered she was going to be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

When she looks back at her accomplishments, she says she is proud of the impact swimming has had on her life.

?I think about the friends I made through swimming and through sport. I think the lessons that I learned about myself and about other people, I think sport is a wonderful venue for learning about people and about yourself,? Jones said.

?In 1993, I was selected by the Canadian Olympic Association to represent them at the first joint international session for educators in Olympia, Greece. There were 120 participants there from 60 different countries. But not many women. I was very proud to be a woman representing our country as I am very proud to be a woman to be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.?

Next month, Jones will be inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, at the Induction Celebration Dinner on November 10.

Tickets are currently available online.

**By Robert Belardi**