

SWIMMER PROFILE: Megan Shovlin

By
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One evening, while I was on a Georgia Masters Board of Directors Zoom meeting, an unfamiliar face popped up on the screen. Her name was Megan Shovlin; and, as a new Georgia resident, she wanted to learn more about Georgia Masters. It wasn't long after Megan joined the board that she was introduced as our new Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Chair. Welcome, Megan!

As Megan gets to know Georgia Masters, I thought we could get to know her, too. In December, I spoke with Megan about her life before moving to Georgia and what brought her here.

A Maryland native, Megan got an early start in swimming when she was a little tyke. “My first memory is my dad throwing me into the water at about 3 years old, and I joined my first swim team at 4 years old,” she said. When she was 7, her family moved to New Jersey, and she joined a YMCA swim team, competing until early high school. It was much more competitive than she wanted, so she quit swimming to focus on soccer. While still in high school, her family relocated to Las Vegas, and Megan returned to swimming. As she explained, “My brother was a swimmer, and we were looking for a new team for him. We went to the Boulder City Henderson (BCH) swim team’s pool, and we watched [the swimmers in the outdoor pool from the building windows up above]. I was struck by how beautiful it was. The lights under the water, the stadium lights above the pool, the sunset, and the mountains were stunning. I thought, it is so beautiful, I have to swim in that pool!”

“Moving across the country when I was that age was difficult. Swimming allowed me to make friends outside of my high school and form a different community that was more accepting and a better fit for me. Returning to swimming was the best decision I could have made.”

Megan continued swimming through college at Loyola University, in Baltimore, Maryland, and then got burnt out. “I started out pretty average on the team. But I decided that if I was going to wake up at 5:30am every day and push my body to compete in a Division 1 program, I was going to be good at it. And I wanted my name on the shiny record board, so I did it. I broke 6 individual school records, 5 of which still stand. But, by the end of college, I was really burned out.”

It was eight years before Megan gave swimming another shot. In 2018, she wanted to get back in shape while living in South Korea and teaching English. After a difficult search (due to the language and cultural barriers), she found a Masters team to join at the 1988 Seoul Olympic

pool. She swam with the team for two years and was fortunate to be in South Korea when the World Masters Swimming Championships were held in Gwangju, in 2019. “I thought, how cool is this? What an opportunity! I didn’t know if I would ever have the opportunity again to swim in an international competition, so I was excited to register.” Megan had recently returned to swimming and wasn’t in prime condition to compete, yet she placed in the top 10 of her age group in the 400-meter freestyle. Megan enjoyed trading team caps with the other swimmers at the end of the meet, which led to a new hobby of collecting foreign swim caps.

In 2020, Megan moved back to the U.S. to attend graduate school in Phoenix, Arizona, at Thunderbird School of Global Management (the international business school of Arizona State University). She joined the Swim Devils Masters team and thoroughly enjoyed training outdoors in a beautiful setting. “Swimming outdoors every day was wonderful for my mental health. Watching hundreds of sunrises and sunsets, breathing the fresh air, and being tan all year were things I did not take for granted.”

After living and studying in Arizona for two years, Megan graduated with her Masters in Global Management Degree, and then landed a job as the Employee Programs Senior Coordinator, in Technical Operations Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, with Delta Airlines, in Atlanta.

Megan’s professional knowledge, experience, and passion made her an excellent fit for the Georgia Masters board chair. “When I saw the Diversity and Inclusion position on the Georgia Masters Board of Directors, I thought, this is perfect for me! I’m so passionate about swimming which has brought great joy and purpose to my life, and I’m excited to expand on my professional passion for Diversity & Inclusion. It’s the perfect marriage of these two important parts of my life.”

When asked what she hopes to accomplish in her new board roll, Megan replied, “First I have a lot to learn. I need to understand the environment and not jump in and try to change anything without understanding where I’m starting from. I need to see where there are gaps and where I can help fill those gaps. In time, know I will also incorporate areas that I am personally passionate about. For instance, refugees - particularly refugee women and girls - and helping to make swimming more accessible, safe, and comfortable. Additionally, the Black community is an important part of this region and I believe there is a lot of opportunity to make a difference. I want to be intentional and realistic about this role, while expanding on the wonderful foundation that my predecessor, Leann Rossi, built.

One of Megan’s primary focuses will be water safety. As she explained, “I was a lifeguard for many years; it was my first job. I even went on to be a lifeguard at two Las Vegas casinos. I think water safety and being comfortable near the water is critical. However, access to a pool and resources to learn to swim are privileges that not everyone has. I’m interested in learn to swim opportunities and making water safety the foundation of my work.”

Megan emphasized she does not want to limit her scope to the Atlanta area. “The Georgia LMSC represents the whole state, not just Atlanta. I am open to working with any group, and listening to any community or representative that ever wants to reach out and connect with me.

Please feel free to get in contact and share your experiences, concerns, or questions that you have. I am happy to learn from and engage with all of our members.”

As a Masters swimmer, Megan trains with Atlanta Rainbow Trout, at the Georgia Tech Campus Recreation Center. “I’m so proud to be a part of this team, they are such a wonderful community. They have really accepted me and embraced me, and made me feel like I’m a part of something. I’m grateful for that,” she said about her new team.

Since Megan works full time, she has to fit swimming in around her work schedule. “I train regularly, and swim as much as I can. It brings me physical and mental happiness. It’s not so much about competing these days, rather, moving my body and being around other people and the positive energy generated from that. I’ve had the opportunity to jump in with other Masters teams as well, and it’s a great way for me to get to know the area and meet new people. I enjoy working out, volunteering, and attending events like the recent US Masters “Relay” conference in Houston, but not so much competing. I did a lot of competing when I was younger and my priorities have shifted a bit.”

Megan did compete in a swim meet this past year, though. At the Atlanta Rainbow Trout’s long course meters meet, she swam the 800-meter freestyle and landed 5th in the national rankings. “I may compete occasionally as long as it stays fun,” she said about that meet and the other Masters competitions she has been in since her return to swimming. “I have a tendency to get competitive with myself, and at this point in time, I want to keep it fun. Swimming is just as important for my mental health as my physical health. I’ve struggled with my mental health in the past, and I’ve learned to recognize the things that bring me joy and intentionally continue doing them. Creating space for the things that make me genuinely happy is the most important thing.”

“For anybody that is struggling, whether it’s physical or mental, getting active in any way is going to be so helpful. You may think, ‘Oh, I can’t get back into the water. I’m not fast enough, I’m not fit enough, I don’t have a suit that fits me, I don’t like the way I look, or I don’t know what I’m doing... I get it. But you won’t regret taking the first step. Everyone has to start somewhere. I remember getting back in the water after my struggles and it was really hard. [I had] to be brave and just do it for myself. I believed it would make me feel better, and that I had to start somewhere. I trusted that it wouldn’t always be that way; I would get better. You have to be easy on yourself. Give yourself grace.”

Before Megan made that leap back into the pool in South Korea, she had traveled to northern Spain and walked the Camino de Santiago, a 550-mile walking pilgrimage, giving her a lot of confidence and perspective. She learned a lot during that epic walk. “I realized I was good at navigating the unknown and thriving somewhere foreign where I didn’t understand the language or the culture,” She didn’t even know where she would sleep or eat each day during the walk, so there were a lot of unknowns she encountered each day. All of the walking and traveling got Megan more active, and that prepared her for her return to swimming. “Once I was

able to get back in the pool, I got faster, lost weight, and was able to maintain my mental health, which has been the greatest gift.”

In addition to swimming being so beneficial for her health, having a connection to the community is also important to Megan. When asked what else she likes most about swimming, she replied, “A connection to the community everywhere that I have lived and where I travel. For example, I studied abroad in college in Auckland, New Zealand, and found a pool there. It was a challenge to swim on the left side of the lane and flip turn in the opposite direction! And during my graduate school program I had a 3-week project in Bogota, Colombia and found a lovely Masters team to swim with there.”

When asked what she has enjoyed about her involvement in USMS, Megan said, “How inclusive it is. The whole concept of Masters involves being open to everyone of all ages, of all backgrounds, and all abilities. That’s huge, because swimming can be so intimidating. People come up to me all the time and they say, ‘I couldn’t swim like you.’ And, I say, ‘It doesn’t matter. You are welcome, there’s a place for you, we’ll be happy to have you.’ It’s so true on every Masters team I’ve ever swam with. Watching people of every background, age, and ability get in and share something that I love so much; that’s the best part of Masters.”