

SPECIAL OLYMPIAN SWIMMERS HEAD TO STATE MEET

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When Jenny Cashion made the decision to get actively involved with the Boerne Blaze Special Olympics, the organization offered two competitive opportunities for its 35-40 members, bowling and track.

While events were participatory, the level of strident competition was lacking.

That was 2007, and Cashion knew she wanted better offerings for the Blaze and its athletes, including her son, Adam, 29, who has Down syndrome.

"That wasn't sufficient for Jenny," said Paul Cashion, her husband. "She sought to make it more organized -- not to be just a 'club,' but to be inclusive."

Since Jenny became delegation head in 2007, sport offerings increased to seven, including bowling, swimming, indoor triathlon, basketball, cycling, tennis and kayaking, with demonstration sports Top Golf, pickleball and disc golf. Cheer and dance are on their way, she said.

Blaze participatory membership has nearly doubled, to about 70 athletes today.



Boerne Blaze Special Olympic swimmers Adam Cashion (front) and Rebecca Stone complete laps Thursday at the Omega swim center.

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Star photo by Jeff B. Flinn

SWIMMERS

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"It's a place of belonging. You can be who you are," Jenny Cashion said of the athletes, many of whom have Down syndrome, are on the autism spectrum, or may have cerebral palsy or other physical or intellectual debilitating conditions.

"We try to meet everybody in step -- whatever their ability is, to help them get better," she said. "We do have some very competitive people, but our parents are all just grateful for what we do."

The Boerne Blaze is not just a social venture for its athletes, Paul Cashion said, although there's a definite social aspect to bringing together athletes of similar traits, as well as their parents.

"It's not merely a social gathering," he said. "They're working hard, and they are trying to improve. They are working on sportsmanship

and cheering for other members of the team. It's just not a cut-throat competition, to beat somebody."

Having a chance to compete -- to hear the starter's gun, or the whistle that starts a swimmer's 200-meter race, or to swing a golf club and witness the ball flying dozens of yards away -- is rewarding in and of itself, she said.

"It means the world to them," Jenny said. "And it's deeply impacted my life, too."

The Cashions look to expand the Blaze's core of volunteers, coaches and participating athletes and parents.

"We didn't even have a website for a long time," she said. "There are people who would finally find us and say, 'I moved here a few years ago, and didn't even know you were around.' We're trying to get more exposure, because there are a lot of people out there who could join us."

Boerne Blaze swim team members competed in the Sept. 16 SOTX Area 20

swim meet in San Antonio and garnered 42 medals in the competition with five other teams.

Nine Blaze swimmers -- Alexa Boehm, Adam Cashion, Kylah Daniel, Elijah Draughn, Christopher Drollinger, Carley Fisk, Rebecca Stone, Jeff Walker and Ansley Wigger --- advanced to the SOTX Fall Classic state swim meet Oct. 20-21 on the Texas A&M Campus in College Station.

"My motive," she said, "is, an organization gets bigger, it needs to have more than one or two people to rely upon for all aspects of events. That includes being visible, for more participants, and more opportunities to volunteer: a chance for other groups or organizations to partner up, to be more positive in the community, and to have some fun."

Cashion said anyone interested in learning more about events, as well as coaching or volunteer opportunities, can contact the organization through its website, boerneblaze.org