

Triathletes give their all to help poor

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

GENEVA — The adage, "Give until it hurts," takes on a new meaning each year on the north shore of Seneca Lake.

Runners, cyclists and canoeists have gathered for the past eight years at Geneva's lake front to give their all during the Miracle-in-the-Park team triathlon.

At stake, however, is more than just winning the triathlon or setting personal best times in the individual events.

The needs of the poor in the Finger Lakes region are also at stake.

The annual triathlon is sponsored by the Geneva Interfaith Council. Entry fees, as well as contributions from various sponsors, support such groups as CROP, the Salvation Army and the Geneva Center of Concern.

This year's triathlon, which took place on July 14, was one of the most successful ever, according to the Rev. Jim Gerling, pastor of the city's Presbyterian Church. Eighty-nine teams, 28 "iron people" (athletes who compete in all three events), and 30 walkers (who garnered money through pledges) combined to raise approximately \$9,000. That figure brings the eight-year total to more than \$50,000.

Among the teams competing this year was one led by St. Stephen's parishioner Greg Lavin.

Lavin ran 6.2 miles before Bernard Carroll rode a bicycle 22 miles, and Christopher Capozzi and Paul Evangelista canoed four miles.

The St. Stephen's team didn't win any titles last Saturday. In fact, it finished last in the men's division (aged 30-39), posting a time of 2:41.10. But where teams finished the triathlon wasn't the point, Lavin observed.

"It had an atmosphere of giving that you normally don't get in a race," Lavin said. "I've never known of anything like this to raise money for the poor."

The triathlon was created by several community church leaders to replace the annual crop walk, which, the Rev. Gerling said, ceased due to a lack of leadership. In the early years, the triathlon drew only local competitors, but as word began to spread, triathletes from across New York state began to sign up. The Rev. Gerling pointed out that triathlons are held throughout upstate New York during the summer months, but, "We're the only one that's doing it deliberately as a fundraiser," he said.

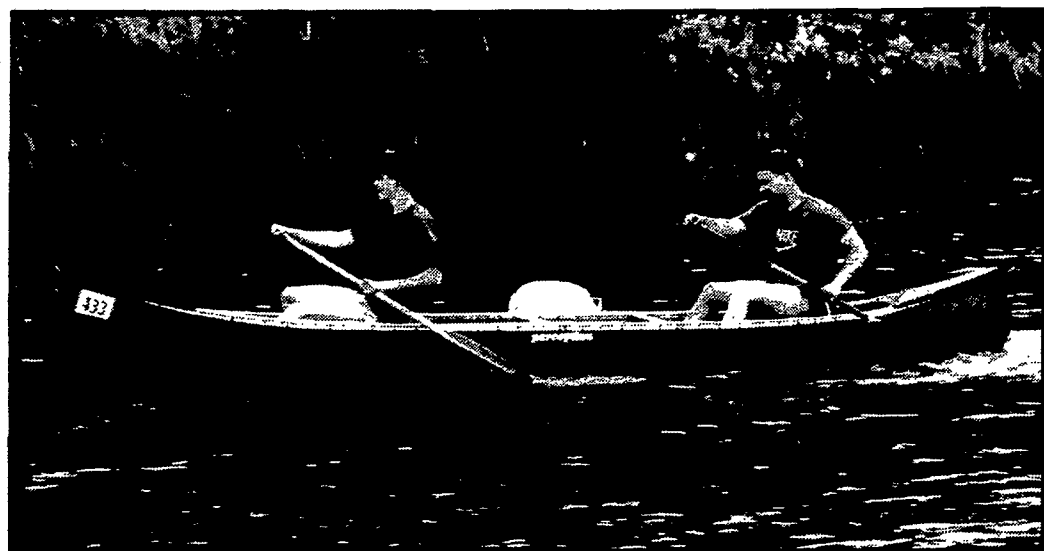


Finishing the first leg of the Miracle-in-the-Park triathlon, Greg Lavin, right, hands the team wristband to bicyclist Bernard Carroll.

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer



Bernard Carroll pedaled 22 miles up and down the Seneca Lake countryside.



Paul Evangelista, left, and fellow canoeist Christopher Capozzi maneuver around a final buoy during the canoe segment of the July 14 triathlon held in Seneca Lake State Park.

This year, a five-mile walk was added for people who wanted to support the cause, but who were not up to competing in the triathlon.

Lavin had no problem competing. He's been in the triathlon for seven of its eight years, and has been running competitively since his days at Colgate University. In 1969, as part of the two-mile relay team, he set a school record that still stands at Colgate.

He also played soccer in college, and he

now coaches the girls' soccer team at DeSales High School.

Lavin is no stranger to social causes, either. During the Vietnam War, he served time in prison for opting not to fight in the war and not fleeing to Canada.

Lavin's community involvement continued when he became an emergency medical technician, and — after moving Geneva in the 1970s — tried to organize an ambulance service. He later became a member of the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry's board of directors, and is currently coordinating the agency's campaign to collect Blue Boy labels, which can be redeemed from the company at five cents each. Money raised will be used to buy food for the food pantry operated by the social ministry office.

"I like to do things for the community," Lavin said. "I've always tried to do whatever I could to help people."

Lavin was philosophical in looking at the triathlon this year — and his team's finish.

He noted that his teammates were competing just for the fun of it — and to help the area poor. Other competitors, he said, were serious athletes, equipped with racing bikes and canoes.

"There are a lot of people who seriously train for biking and canoeing," Lavin observed. "The competition was there, but it wasn't with the edge of other races."

The Rev. Gerling likewise observed that the triathlon has developed a good reputation among competitors because of its size, organization, competitiveness, and goal.

But if it has earned a good reputation, will it attract more competitors in the future?

Not if the Rev. Gerling has a say in it. "The size of our race is what we can handle," he said.

But the race could always use additional sponsors, he observed. In addition, the walk could also accommodate more participants.

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A: _____

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