MENLO MASTERS 93

Local Legend

Let's swim!

Local Legends Lorie & Sam Sinnott: Beyond the Lane Lines, A Zesty Life of Design, Sports, and Family

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We're From Around Here

Lorie: We've lived in our Menlo Park house for 44 years. I grew up in Menlo Park, on Oak Knoll Lane. Our house was originally my grandmother's house. When my grandmother passed away, I was pregnant with Jackie, our first, and we were living in Redwood Shores in a little one-bedroom condo right on one of the lagoons (*Sam*: It was nice, but tiny!). I remember, I was 9 months pregnant and huge, and was ripping up carpets, and pulling down drapes to try to get the new house ready. We were so desperate to be settled with a new family! It was a two bedroom, two bath house, and then Sam designed the whole second story, and fixed up the living area.

Sam: I grew up on San Mateo Drive and Bay Laurel, just down by the creek. We met at Oak Knoll Elementary School, then K-8. I didn't like Lorie that much in middle school. We started dating our senior year of high school. We had our 50-year high school reunion in 2022. We've been sweethearts for over 50 years!

Sam Designed Things From the Start

Lorie: We got closer in high school because I asked Sam to design some posters for me. I did all the posters and props for the M-A (Menlo Atherton High School) musicals and other shows. I needed a designer for my publicity poster silkscreens, and Sam was on the list. He'd come over and help me silkscreen, and then he wouldn't go home! He just wanted to watch another movie, and another movie, and, well, okay! Of course, it was just whatever was on TV back then!

Pre-Title 9 College Swimming

Sam: I had gotten tired of hanging out with guys.

Lorie: Besides theater in high school, I was a Candy-Striper at the Stanford Hospital. When he introduced me to his mother, I think I had my uniform on. I had ridden my bike over to his house, and she was there ironing and humming, and very sweetly said, “Oh, who’s this?”

Editor's Note: A Candy Striper is a traditional term for a young hospital volunteer, typically a teenage girl, who wears a pink and white striped uniform. Their duties involved tasks like delivering meals and mail and helping with basic comforts like filling water pitchers and changing beds.

On the Track: Go-Karts and Running the Mile

Sam: Starting in middle school, I was really into Go-Kart racing. My father and I traveled all over Northern California, to the various tracks, for the weekend competitions. It was serious stuff. We had a shop in the basement. It’s like the first step toward becoming a formula racer. The racing is on a track, so you don’t need a driver’s license. We’re talking ninety miles an hour! It’s really noisy and, besides genetics, contributed to my current hearing loss (thanks lane mates for repeating the swim sets!).


SPORTS-

CITY OF PALO ALTO

61-01

Milers Sam Simon, at right, and Loren Diaz helped the City team to a divisional national championship in Corporate Cup Relays last weekend at Stanford.

that not only did the city have a large contingent present, there were simply more fans overall than in previous years.

In the "AA" Division, for companies with over 1,000 employees, AT&T held off General Electric for the national title. In

I ran in high school—on the track and cross-country teams. I was skinny as a rail! In the fall I’d do cross-country running and in the spring I’d do track. During my sophomore year, I broke my ankle skiing and missed most of the track season, making my coach very angry! I ran mostly middle distance—the 880, and the mile. My best time for the mile was right around 4:46. I didn’t run in college. Track wasn’t quite mainstream, not the same cache as today.

I only started swimming because I couldn’t run anymore. I kept pulling my calf muscles. With a calf pull, it would take six weeks to heal, but would never really recover 100%. I ran with Tim quite a bit. I ran a lot of marathons. My times were in the 2:40’s.

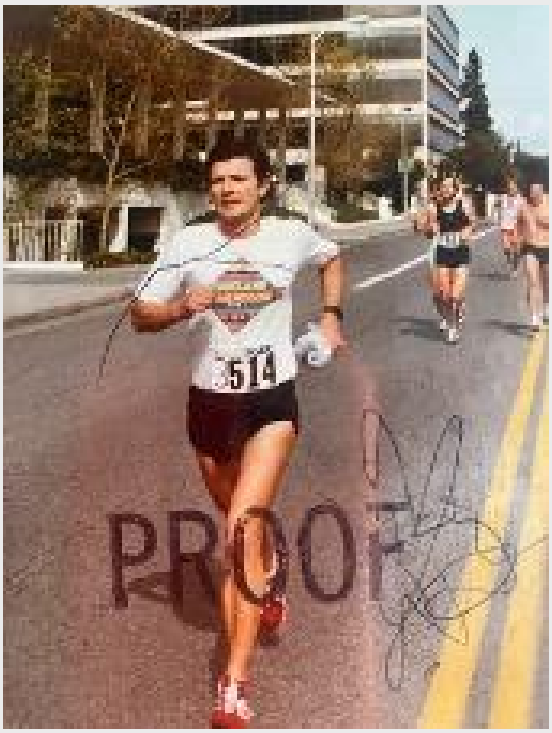
Editor’s Note: A 2:40 marathon for an amateur man is an exceptionally fast, near-elite time, top 1-2% and means running about 6:10 per mile over 26.2 miles.

Practically Founding Members of Menlo Masters

Lorie: I swam on the summer swim team at Menlo Country Club until I was about 12 years old. Menlo Country Club was part of this league called the PISL—Peninsula Inter-Club Swim League. It’s actually still around and includes Sharon Heights, Menlo Country Club, Los Altos, Peninsula and Circus Club. Our daughters and granddaughters swam in it.

Back then I always came in 4th place, 5th place. Never got a ribbon, probably not once! As soon as my parents would let me, I quit the team, but I kept swimming. M-A had a girls' team, but I didn't join. I wasn't a fast swimmer. The bathing suits were red cotton material, like a t-shirt without any elastic in it! We'd come in after PE swimming with Miss Nagai there at the M-A pool, and she'd blow a whistle and yell, "Strip!" .

After we started dating as seniors, Sam would join me at the pool and swim laps. He was never on a swim team, but he could swim well. I like swimming, so I've always just found a pool and swam, even when I was going to school in Colorado, not competitive swimming, just something I enjoyed doing.



I was 40 years old when I started swimming with Menlo Masters, about 1994. Jane Walker and I started the same day. We were swimming at Ladera and I said, "Jane, we are going to go swim at Burgess." I had met Tim on deck there because he was coaching my kids' swim team. He was just starting the Menlo Masters team, and there were only about eight people. We were some of the first people to join. I said, "Jane, I'll see you tomorrow morning at 7:00 am." But I didn't get a good night's sleep and didn't show up, so she called me, "Where are you?" This was at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning!

There weren't a lot of workouts at that time, but Tim kept adding workouts and building the team. I was one of the first Menlo Masters, with Jane and also Carl Mortenson—he was a stalwart—and Bill Kirsch, and a gal named Norma.

Sam: Tim put me in lane 4 with John Sulzbach. After I joined Menlo Masters, I started running with Tim and doing triathlons for a couple years. I remember I did the Wildflower triathlon in '98 and I did the Santa Cruz Olympic distance triathlon. That's a 1.5k swim, 40k bike and 10k run.

Planning the Burgess Remodel

Lorie: What Tim has created over the decades is phenomenal! I remember going with him to see the head of the City Menlo Park Parks and Recreation 25 years ago or so. Tim put out a whole beautiful program, this dream of what he wanted to do for the City and she just sat there blankly and gave him zero attention.

Sam: In 1998 and 1999 I joined the Master Planning Committee for Burgess Park and specifically the Aquatics Center, with the goal of proposing the new pool to replace the historic 33 yard pool that the City had inherited from the US Army. The committee looked at the design of the whole park including the pools.

Editor's Note: The original 33-yard pool in Menlo Park, known as the Burgess Pool, was built in 1943 as part of the U.S. Army's Dibble General Hospital, a facility specializing in reconstructive surgery during World War II, and later became a public pool.

I was on the Master Planning Committee for Burgess Park Pool Aquatics representing Menlo Masters. We went back and forth on whether to have a 50 meter pool. Our City Council members didn't want to pay for it. The 50 meter pool would have gone all the way over into that grassy area. We designed the pools we have now to best meet the needs of the entire community, so we ended with the performance, instructional and baby pools.

As they studied it further, City Council members Lee DuBoc, Mickie Winkler, and Nicolas Jellins discovered that operating the pool was going to cost them over a million dollars annually. They said, "You know, we can't afford to open the pool. We can't afford to run it." So, we tossed around the idea, and Lorie and I got Tim to come over to my office—because Lorie knew him so well—and said, "Would you like to run it?" And he got back to us and said "Yes", and that he could do it for zero cost to the City!

Lorie: Tim actually didn't even pause, he just said, "I'll go for it!". Keep in mind that while the pool was being rebuilt, the team had no home. Tim arranged for us to swim at Sacred Heart Prep, Woodside High School and the small Redwood City Pool at Herkner.

Sam: At the time Tim stepped forward, he took on an enormous risk that was filled with uncertainty. He did not know what revenue could be generated and did not have a full portfolio of services, staff, and programs like he does today. He didn't even have a pool! I believe that Tim always had a vision of the possibilities and deeply understood that health, exercise, water sports, education, and promotion of a healthy lifestyle could be the cornerstones of the organization that serves the City residents and neighbors that became Menlo Swim and Sport.

Grateful for City's Aquatic Progress

Sam: Tim is a treasure. I remember in 2011 when they were re-upping his five-year contract, "Well, we want you to run the Belle Haven pool too." It had been a seasonal pool until then, only open 10 weeks. Lorie taught Red Cross swimming lessons there one summer. The City ran it as a seasonal pool due to the high costs of running a year round pool with a smaller number of local residents in the neighborhood.

Editor's Note: The Belle Haven neighborhood has 5,400 people out of a total Menlo Park population of 34,000 (2020 census).

Sam: Taking on that pool was a challenge from the beginning. Tim was always trying to figure out how to operate it even at a break-even level.

Lorie: In the last year, many Menlo Masters members have taken the time to understand and support Menlo's Aquatics and the two municipal

pools.

I saw Mayor Drew Combs recently. He had office hours at Peets Coffee. I thanked him again for supporting us. I said, “You know, it is very difficult to go through this amount of disruption and distraction every two years.” I think about how earlier City leaders would disregard Tim when he was a young 30-something with his dream. And now he’s doing his dream! He’s doing it, but he’s had to fight all the way!

Open Water Events...We come for the BBQ!

Lorie: Sam did the La Jolla Open Swim Relay in 2023, and we’ve done a lot of Lake Berryessa open water swims, and we did trans-Tahoe a few times.

Editor’s Note: The La Jolla Relay is a 10 mile swim, typically done by a team of 5 members. The Trans Tahoe Swim is an annual open-water relay race across the width of Lake Tahoe of approximately 10 miles Organized by the Olympic Club of San Francisco, it involves teams of six swimmers who rotate in 30-minute and 10-minute segments. Swimming at an altitude of over 6,000 feet and in water that is 60 degrees makes it a challenging event.

Sam: Nobody finishes after just their half-hour swims. Most teams do a second or third rotation.

Lorie: I think we had thermal caps, but no wetsuits, so it was cold. The most memorable part was the BBQ afterwards with our team. Other Masters were waiting on the pier as each team finished. I remember my father went along on the boat one year. He was thrilled! I think we did it three times, but then, the final time, I hyperventilated and kind of flipped out. It was too cold and too choppy, so I panicked. The other five people had to finish it. If you’re really feeling too cold, you’ve got to depend on your teammates.

Sam: When I did La Jolla it was beautiful, the water was around 70 degrees. And there was a great party! That is the great thing about doing open water team events, we can celebrate together after doing something out of the ordinary.

Some people can do the cold and others can’t. Elsbeth Farmer swims for an open water team/rowing club in the City, usually 3 times per week at Aquatic Park. No wet suit! In the Bay! All year long! That’s like 50 degrees! I couldn’t do it!

Mike Dorsey and I went up to Tahoe early one year, on Fourth of July, three weeks before the race. Well, we dove in and it was 58 degrees. Wow! Time stands still! We did our half hour and when I came out, I just couldn’t stop shaking. I went hypothermic from doing that half hour.

A Coach's Nudge to Race

Sam: I remember this one year we all went to this swim meet at UC Santa Cruz, at the 50 meter pool. The whole team went up there, and we all did the 200 butterfly! I also did some breaststroke events and apparently I got a top ten time in the 100 breaststroke! They sent me this patch. I

showed it to Tim and said, “There must be some mistake.” I got through 200 fly by double kicking for 150, so that I had enough energy left to go all out on the home stretch.

I’m not really doing meets anymore, but there’s this guy Bob Anderson, who's one lane up from me, who’s a real fast breaststroker, and he’s on me all the time about going to meets. He’s 70 now and I just turned 71. He’s one of the racing team’s four Bobs, of the “All Bob Relay” which would be Bob Crockett, Bob Anderson, Bob Hubbell and Bob Henig. Yeah, I might do that. Hard to resist an All Bob.

Lorie: My willingness to compete totally comes from Tim pushing me! He would say, “You’re coming, and you’re going to be in this relay.” And I’d be like, “Oh really?” He’s just a good coach. I would never have done it otherwise.

Sam: I wouldn’t have done the swim meets without Tim pushing me.

Lorie: Sam, you have the competitive spirit! I’d go to a swim meet thinking, “I’m just going to do the 50 breaststroke, but he’d say, “I’ve got you signed up for this and this and this.” And I’d do it. No, I don’t get nervous before my events, Trying to get a good performance time? Not so much. Try to have fun? Definitely! All my competitors are getting older with me, and they’re still faster than me!

Sam: I’m such a middle-of-the-pack swimmer that I’ve resigned myself to it. I was so surprised to get that top ten time award...and I guess Tim was too! In those days I WAS a good breaststroker.

Menlo Masters Equals Annual Team Challenges

Sam: I haven’t done the Killer Quad in at least ten years. I remember the year we were at Sacred Heart Prep and I led the 10K, the whole thing, in that 50-meter pool. That’s when I was young and stupid.

Editor’s Note: The New Years Swim of the 4-part Killer Quad is a 100 x 100yd swim, with leadership changes.

Lorie: And the “What’s your WHISK time?” You’d do three 100-foot sprints trying to break your previous time. Tim constantly had a new challenge.

Editor’s Note: Current Masters team annual challenges include the Can-Do Challenge, Versatility Challenge (all the events in a swim meet over a month), 2500 Sprint Challenge, Killer Quad, and the Year Rounder (10K per month for a year)

Sam: I’ve got a few of those stainless steel trophies from the Killer Quad.

Lorie: I always seem to miss at least one of the Killer Quad swims, so I don’t have a trophy!

Sam: I liked that challenge we did recently, where we did five sprints on the minute at the end of practice (2500 Sprint Challenge). It was just enough to push you a little. Tim recognizes the demographic of his team; we’re an older crowd, so he’s adjusted his workouts a little. There’s a few younger ones, but not as many as we’d like.

Tim has your number!

Lorie: I swam at another Masters program for a short time, but it was no comparison to Tim. The

coach just wrote the workout on the board. He didn't really get to know you. That's how it was everywhere else I've swum.

At a different Masters program, the coach didn't pay any attention to the slow side of the pool, ever! You guys don't matter. And she'd do the same workout on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and then the same thing on Tuesday and Thursday! She clearly didn't care if you were there or not, and she ignored you.

Going over to be with Tim who gives everybody stroke correction and drills is such a huge value. He really meets you where you are and finds a way to communicate technique improvements in a way that helps you visualize and implement it. I'm so grateful. It's good to know you can improve at any age.

Sam: He's egalitarian. He gives everybody equal attention.

Lorie: He knows when you're trying and when you're not!

Sam: That's so true. You know when we might do relays or have some time challenges. He knows what a good time is for everyone in that pool. He'll individualize it to make fair teams, or to make the challenge work for everybody. He'll give you a time that you really have to go all out to do. You can make it if you go all out. It's do-able, but barely. Tim has your number!

Lanemates: I see you!

Lorie: Tim always started every workout with the encouragement to "Make sure you know who you're swimming with." That's important. You know your lanemates so well in some ways, except for their lives outside the pool. And it doesn't matter.

Sam: You know Jenny who swims in our lane, the powerful triathlete who does a lot of the Ironmans? Well, it turns out she does colonoscopies over at Menlo Medical Clinic

***Lorie*:** In fact, she did yours! She's like, "I know you!"

Editor's Notes: Dr. Jenn Roost, a gastroenterologist at Stanford Hospital and member of Team Sheeper Triathlon Team and Menlo Masters has completed at least 5 full Ironman races, including the Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii, in 2023 and 2025.

Sam*:* In my 60s I was still pretty strong, but now, since turning 70, I feel like my strength is slipping.

Lorie: Swimming is the one thing I can still do for exercise. I bike a lot, I walk a lot, but I can see that the biking is going to come to an end. I just toodle around and do my own thing. I love going up to Woodside, and Arastradero. I go at my own pace.

Sam: My friend's doc says the main thing is to avoid falling. He says: no sandals, no ladders, no biking. You're at risk of falling. I just got a nice bike that's got a little electric assist. No throttle, just an assist. I'm happy that it will extend my cycling life.

Lorie: During the pandemic, biking kept me sane. I got on my bike, and I just scooted all over. I had to get out. I've done that my whole life.

Start 'Em Young

Sam: We have three kids. They all live more-or-less locally: Menlo Park, Belmont, Mountain View. Six grandchildren, between one and nine years. They all know each other, of course.

Lorie: They come over a lot and we have lots of toys around the house. The oldest two are on the swim team, in the same pool where I grew up swimming, and the youngest are taking lessons at Burgess in Tim's program. They started as newborns, in the Mommy and Me class. I don't think people understand that Tim's program has everyone covered from birth to ninety nine!

Sam: It's a mind-blower. Jackie took Isla when she was six months old.

Lorie: And Jane is over there starting with her granddaughter. They come down from San Francisco just to take this class. It's for everybody. Do you remember boot camp? I did that for a while. I just heard about the Legends workout. It goes from 8:30 to 10:00 on Mondays and Wednesdays with Coach Aleksei and includes 45 min dry land strength training and 45 min swim training. That is so cool! I want to check it out.

Partners in Life, Business and Sports

***Sam*:** I was an architect and contractor, and I had an office for forty years, but I'm working out of my cottage out back here now. I'm tapering off, but I've still got a couple of projects. I've got two people who work for me on independent contractor status.

Lorie: We have one employee, Fred who will be 65 in March. He's been working for us for 35 years! Once he's over 65 he can get on Medicare. Sam is half retired. I manage the office and do the books.

Sam: She also knows where all the money is! She just skims it off the top and puts it in her own private account.. …which we then share!"

Lorie*:* He'll never notice!

About Local Legends

Menlo Masters is gathering and sharing stories of extraordinary individuals on the team. We hope these narratives will connect us with each other and inspire us to swim often.

If you know a swimmer who has some stories, please send an email to Tasha Capen, Menlo Master Team Manager **tasha@menlomasters.com**