

Aquatic youth rock The Aspen Club

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Special to The Aspen Times

You could hear the screams coming through the doors at the Aspen Club & Spa — screams of delight, that is.

Three weeks ago, Felix Frisch wanted nothing to do with a swimming pool. On Wednesday, his father Adam was doing whatever he could to persuade 2-year-old Felix to get out of the water.

Felix is one of 35 infants and toddlers in Judy Heumann's infant aquatic class. Heumann has been working with tots in the pool for 35 years, but she is new to Aspen.

Heumann was teaching in Boulder when she got a call from a stranger, Rachel Hahn. Hahn had been on a trip in Mexico when she saw a tyke no more than 4 years old doing amazing things in the pool. When she asked the boy's mother how he had learned to swim so well, the mother directed Hahn to Heumann's website.

"What will it take to get you up here?" Hahn asked Heumann. Heumann agreed to come to Aspen for four weeks on the condition that Hahn recruit a sufficient number of children.

"When I got here she had 27 kids and within two days there were 35 kids," Heumann said. "A lot of the parents originally had only put in their younger kids, and then they saw what the babies were doing in two days, so they put in their older children."

Each child gets 10 minutes of instruction, five days a week, for four weeks.

"If they are under a year they learn to hold their breath and when their face is on the water they roll over and float on their back," Heumann explained. "If they are over a year, we teach them to propel on their tummy holding their breath, to swim using their legs and to go as far as they can go while holding their breath. When they need air we teach them to roll on their backs, float, rest and breathe. Then, instead of just staying on their backs, we teach walkers to float back on their tummies and continue to swim."

Heumann became interested in child aquatics after the birth of her own son, who is now an adult.

"I had my own child in 1979 ... and I decided that I needed to teach this baby how to swim," she said. "He was my guinea pig. I just sort of experimented on him."

Frisch compares the first couple of days of lessons to watching your baby go through the panic of getting a shot — except that it lasts 10 minutes. But Heumann says that by the end, every child gets comfortable in the water.

"What they are most objecting to is that they don't know what to do," she said. "Once they get more skills, then they start cooperating and they start being happier. It is amazing. It is like a transformation to take these helpless little children and teach them in four weeks, not only how to be safe in the water, but how to have fun."



Felix Frisch, 2, swims Wednesday during a class that teaches infants and toddlers integral water safety skills at The Aspen Club. Jordan Curet The Aspen Times



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Brett Eggleston, 7 months old, floats around the pool Wednesday at The Aspen Club by himself, although his mom is never out of reach. Eggleston is one of 35 infants and toddlers in Judy Heumann's infant aquatic class.

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Bubba Eggleston said the class offers him a measure of reassurance for his 7-month-old daughter as well as for his 2-year-old son.

"Because of this class, my children are self-sufficient in the water. It gives me five or 10 extra minutes to react if something were to happen," he said.

Hahn likes the class as much as her son and daughter, because it opens up more possibilities.

"He is doing it. He is liking it. And now I can go on vacation and he can swim," she said.

Though the class focuses on the children, the responsibility for making it work falls on the parents.

"This is for every child, but it is not for every parent, because you have to be 100 percent committed," said Heumann. "You have to believe in it. You have to want it ... so that your child will look into your eyes and see that they should be excited that they are learning such an important thing. There is no child that fails at this."

After 35 years, Heumann still finds the work gratifying.

"I had a family that wrote me and said that they went to the Barrier Reef and the 2-and-a-half-year-old is snorkeling," she said. "This is a 2-year-old that started swimming with me at 7 months. He was snorkeling with the 5-year-olds. Those are the kinds of things that I remember."