

The Post Crescent
Oh Bah Humbug
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Oh Bah Humbug! That is not my usual nature, except when associating teenagers and fitness. Many people have approached me in the past with suggestions of getting high school students involved in fitness events. My attempts have always been futile. I have tried many times in the past to get this age group attuned to fitness and "no deal." They always seem to be more interested in the next date, latest song or newest fad. I have recently been proven wrong to have such a stereotypical begrudging teenage chip on my shoulders. Sometimes it feels so good to be so-o-o wrong.

Two weeks ago I received a phone call from Lori Leschisin, Assistant Principal at Appleton East. She was inquiring about a student discount for triathlon events. She was also ecstatic to discuss a new triathlon club at Appleton East High School. I nearly fell off my chair in disbelief and blurted out "Your students have a triathlon club? You must be kidding?" Dumbfounded, I had to ask, "And how did this happen?"

First of all, I found Principal Leschisin to be as bubbly as a young school girl herself. She explained how the triathlon club evolved. At the Education Healthy Kids Institute this summer, the committee found while our schools offer plenty of sports to compete we do not offer anything for students who want to be fit and be a part of a group yet not compete. An answer to this dilemma was fitness clubs may very well meet the need for students who want friendships, encouragement and fitness opportunities or events. They found many students do not do traditional high school sports nor have the desire. The reason to not choose sports ranged from too much pressure, too conforming, had a bad experience as kids in organized sports to just not interested. From this survey evolved and populated such groups as: bowling club, ping pong, weight training, cross country ski club, hip hop club and yes, the triathlon club. Wow! I can dig it! Many of us perhaps can remember we didn't all fit into the traditional "jockdom" at high school. Yet who can ever forget the importance of peers and the need to belong?

Ms. Leschisin gives credit to the new up and coming triathlon club to the Appleton Education Foundation and the Education for Healthy Kids Institute. They have given modest financial support to these fitness clubs at East which they need for start up. These monies will go towards equipment and training. She went on to explain, "Lee Allinger, Superintendent and the school board is a strong believer in fitness and its connection to learning. Their support is also important to us. Club members also volunteer to lifeguard while teachers and parents have pitched in to help coach and train.

I had to watch one of the young club's workouts and even though I had to fight a snow storm, it was so worth it. Watching the adults interacting with these young yet mighty triathletes was a ZEN experience. Their efforts were effortless. It was easy to observe how much they wanted to do this for the kids. I watched Jim Donnellan, principal at Edison, who was a volunteer coach the day I was there. Jim, a triathlete himself, exuded such care and deliberateness while coaching, that it was contagious and I mean literally contagious. Just a few minutes after he began, in walks Carol Schubert one of the students parent, to also volunteer as a swim instructor. It made me want to jump up, slip into a swimsuit and pitch in too.

Lori also pointed out the new club members have diverse athletic backgrounds and to that does not matter to them. Lori explained, "There are kids in the club who have never done a triathlon, to some who are on swim teams, to some who have done them win in their age category. Yet they all work so well together and look forward to their swim and spin classes, weekend training clinics, going to triathlons as a club and most of all, camaraderie."

Before training ended, I was able to catch up with one of the members, Taylor Wardall. He is new to the triathlons. "I am in an endurance sport already at school; the cross country team, but I joined this club because I just wanted to do something for fun." That 'fun' word was obvious. These teens were filled with intrigue, curiosity and spunk. They surely busted my stereotype of teens being fitness flatliners.

Ms. Leschisin's son Sam is probably the most savored triathlete in the group. His tri-athletic experience includes doing the first annual High Cliff Sprint Tri six years ago when the white caps were as tall as the White House. He has been doing triathlons since then. Last summer he stepped up to the plate by doing his first Half Ironman at High Cliff. Sam explained, "I just thought to give it a try and was I lucky. One of my friends let me borrow a really

neat, expensive triathlete bike. I won first in my age group and now I want to do at least five triathlons this summer.” You go Sam! You are setting the pace for even us veteran triathletes. Five triathlons in one summer is a really big plate.

Thumbs up to the Appleton East Foundation and Education for Healthy Kids Institute! They are pioneering a program that is so needed for the youth of our society and other schools have caught this momentum. The Cross Country ski club is joining forces with Kimberly High School to be a part of their Kimberly High School Area Cross Country Ski Club who have been around for awhile. Kimberly High School is looking to start a triathlon club and may sign on with the Appleton East Triathlon Club. Yes, it's becoming contagious; contagiously healthy, in such a good way. No more Bah hum bug about teenagers. As for fitness, they too are “on the move.”