

# Learn-to-Swim Classes Offer Lessons for Life



From the time she was 6 months old, Sydney Draetta took to the pool the way fish take to water. Her mother, Juanita, enrolled her in Park Authority aquatics classes early because she wanted to ensure her daughter's safety around water.

"She's my only child, and I didn't want her to drown, so I made a conscious effort to get her involved with swimming," Juanita said. "She liked it, and she stuck with it."



Sydney progressed beautifully from the Park Authority's baby-and-parent classes to children's lessons to competitive swimming, and Juanita was there every step of the way, watching from the pool deck. The Fairfax mom never had any formal swim training herself, but she felt confident that she was learning enough by listening to what the aquatic instructors were teaching her daughter. She came to regret that decision during a recent family vacation to the beach.

"The water was deeper than I thought," Juanita recalled of their attempt to swim to a trampoline suspended in water off the shore of the Turks and Caicos Islands. "I panicked, and I didn't know what to do."

Juanita says she wanted to swim back to the shore, but her struggle to stay afloat and her panicked-induced shallow breathing led to muscle failure, and she knew she couldn't make it. Fearing that she would drown, Juanita started screaming, and 10-year-old Sydney, who had already climbed on to the trampoline with other people, answered her mother's call for help.



"I heard her yelling and thought she was joking when I dove in," Sydney said matter-of-factly. "When I got to her, I realized she wasn't joking and took her by the hand and led her to shore."



Sydney calmly gave her mother the instruction she learned from Park Authority swim instructors, "Once you hold your head back, your body will follow," and together they made it to the shore.

"Sydney was my little hero," Juanita said with gratitude. "Every time I see her, I realize I might not have been here to help her. I might have left her and my husband, Ralph."

Determined to make the most of what she calls a second chance at life, Juanita has already started taking adult swim lessons at Oak Marr RECenter. She looks forward to strengthening her own swimming skills and ensuring that she's around for many more family vacations and milestones to come.



May is National Water Safety Month, and the Park Authority's certified swim instructors offer learn-to-swim classes and private lessons for adults and children at all nine RECenters. To find a class near you, turn to the Aquatics section or contact the aquatics manager at the RECenter of your choice.