

#21

LA It's Happening Here: Scholarship Contest

By Meredith Byard

Proud polliwogs, terrific tadpoles, gutsy guppies, and jumping jellyfish are all part of what gives Lewiston- Auburn its positive and "happening" reputation. All of these great characters can be found in swimming lessons at the YWCA of Central Maine in Lewiston. As shy three-year-old, the idea of jumping freely into a swimming pool and plummeting beneath the surface was terrifying. I spent the majority of my first swim lessons in tears and I dreaded each and every trip to the YWCA. At the time, no one would have ever guessed that I would grow up to be the Captain of my high school swim team, a lifeguard, and a water safety instructor.

My experiences with swimming at the YWCA have come full circle and are greatly responsible for the person I am today. Through elementary school, I successfully progressed from the timid, terrified three-year-old to a more comfortable, confident swimmer completing all the American Red Cross Learn-to-Swim levels. Entering high school, I returned to the YWCA as a member of the Edward Little high school swim team. I have just finished my fourth and final season, and it is easy to say that being on the team has positively shaped my entire high school experience. Through the sport of swimming I have grown to be more confident in my role as a student, teammate, captain, and friend.

Also in high school, I took classes at the YWCA to become an American Red Cross certified lifeguard and water safety instructor. Currently, I am an employee of the YWCA as a lifeguard and swim instructor. I feel very fortunate to have a job that allows me to enjoy what I do, as well as to help the community.

Becoming a swim instructor has proven to be one of my best life experiences. Working with children of all ages and ability has been a rewarding experience that has opened my eyes to the growing diversity and excitement within our community. Swimming and working at the YWCA has provided the perfect environment for me to break out of my shell and to become a more confident person.

For many people, the "happening" locations in Lewiston-Auburn may be the more exciting entertainment events. Most teens would probably choose glow-in-the-dark bowling or a Maineiacs hockey game over teaching swim lessons at 7:30am on a Saturday. However, it's not always the flashing lights and loud cheering that give the Twin Cities their innovative and unique character. For me, teaching swim lessons can be more enjoyable than a night-out in a new restaurant. The YWCA gives a lot to Lewiston-Auburn by providing a place for everyone. Whether it is lessons for children, swim practices for teens, or exercise classes for adults the YWCA remains a "happening" place for the entire family.

I am proud of my transformation from tears to teacher. I think that my experiences with the YWCA demonstrate the benefits of having locations in the Twin Cities where people can go to have fun, learn, and grow.

Everybody in the pool!

It's Happening Here!