

## Foundation raises money for swim lessons

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By JAN WADDY

Monday marked three years since Carolyn and Jeff Bottorf lost their 3-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, to a drowning accident in their backyard pool. Since then they have been devoted to raising awareness about water safety.

"It is the worst thing that could ever happen to someone. We want to keep kids happy and safe," Carolyn Bottorf said. "We really would like to stress the importance of water safety and how things can happen very quickly — for parents to be aware.

"It took less than two minutes for Elizabeth to get out of sight and into the pool. "

You might think you have everything set up safe and secure and that quick something can happen," Jeff Bottorf said.

They established Elizabeth Bottorf Memorial Foundation ([www.elizabethmemorialfoundation.org](http://www.elizabethmemorialfoundation.org)) in 2008 to raise money for scholarships that have been set up at The Central Panhandle Chapter of the American Red Cross to provide swimming lessons for children whose parents cannot afford them.

Jeff Bottorf wrote of Elizabeth on the foundation's website, "She was the best Father's Day gift a guy could ever get." Elizabeth Breanna Bottorf was born June 15, 2003 and "was taken to Heaven on May 24, 2007." The Bottorfs want something good to come out of their tragedy through their efforts to provide water safety education and swimming lessons. Scholarship money has been raised from an annual redfish tournament and fish fry at Porter Park in Lynn Haven. Jeff Bottorf, who works in engineering at Century Boats, contacted vendors for prizes and donations of marine and fishing related items. The first year, 56 anglers participated, they sold 350 fish plates, and 24 fish were weighed in. The second year, participation was up to 76 anglers, and this year, Jeff Bottorf said, he is hoping for 100.

Each year, the benefits have raised \$6,000 with half of the proceeds going to the Red Cross. In the summer of 2009, 100 children benefitted from the \$3,000 donation. The other half has gone to build a memorial playground at the Bottorfs' church, First Pentecostal Church of Panama City. The Bottorf family also includes Victoria, 11, and Addisyn, 15 months.

"The thought of it (Elizabeth drowning) is horrifying," said Bob Pearce, executive director of the Central Panhandle Chapter of the American Red Cross. "They really want to help others so no one else has to go through this."

The scholarships are given to agencies the Red Cross works with, the main ones being Early Education and Care and Headstart. Those organizations then give the scholarships out to the families they deal with, after determining who best could use them.

"This is the third year, and if we didn't do it — at 100 scholarships a year — that would be a lot of kids who wouldn't know how to swim," Pearce said.



*Carolyn and Jeff Bottorf established Elizabeth Bottorf Memorial Foundation ([www.elizabethmemorialfoundation.org](http://www.elizabethmemorialfoundation.org)) in 2008 to raise money for scholarships that have been set up at The Central Panhandle Chapter of the American Red Cross to provide swimming lessons for children whose parents cannot afford them. Their daughter, Elizabeth, drowned in 2007 in their backyard pool. Carolyn and Jeff are shown with their daughters, Addisyn, 1, and Victoria, 11, as they hold a picture of Elizabeth at age 3.*

## Foundation raises money for swim lessons—Cont.

### Red Cross swimming lessons

The Central Panhandle Chapter is offering the newly updated American Red Cross Swimming and Water Safety program, combining swim instruction with a stronger emphasis on drowning prevention and water safety for anyone, regardless of age or skill level.

"When it comes to aquatics programs and swimming, we're the big one," Pearce said.

Parent and Child Aquatics is for parents and children from 6 months to about 3 years to learn together, increase a child's comfort level in the water and build a foundation of basic skills.

"A 6-month-old class is just familiarizing them with the water," Pearce said. "In our lower level swim classes, from 6 months to level 1, they don't leave knowing how to do strokes. They are basic how-not-to-drown classes, basic how to survive. Most people don't realize you can drown in just a couple inches of water."

Preschool Aquatics is for ages 4 to 5 to learn basic aquatic safety and survival skills. "

Every child receives basic safety training of how to be safe in and around the water, and they get in water with instructors and learn to float," Pearce said.

Learn-to-Swim courses are for swimmers of all ages (including senior citizens) and abilities to develop water safety, survival and swim skills.

The cost for the Red Cross swimming lessons is \$55 per session for eight lessons, unless a scholarship is given to a family through Early Education and Care or Headstart.

"We may sign up 1,000 people through our office but don't have the resources to do the casework," Pearce said.

So don't contact the Red Cross if you think you might qualify for a discounted rate because they do not decide. A few referrals are from the Bottorfs, although theirs is not the only scholarship through the Red Cross.

The Kiwanis Club of Panama City Beach gives money every year to the Boys & Girls Club for children to learn how to swim. On Tuesday, the club presented its annual \$1,000 contribution to the Panama City Beach Aquatic Center for the Every Child a Swimmer project, in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club.

The Red Cross once gave only full scholarships for the agencies to give to recipients, but now about 20 percent are full and the rest require \$10.

"We had done all full, but people weren't showing up," Pearce said. He said they found if some families invested a little in the lessons, they tended to attend.

Weekday and Saturday schedules are available. The first Saturday session begins June 12, and the first weekday session begins June 15.

For more information on swimming lessons or to register, call the Red Cross at 763-6587.

Red Cross Swimming lessons are at Frank Brown Park. Red Cross Swim programs also are at the Navy Base, Tyndall Air Force Base, Gulf Coast Community College, the Boys & Girls Club and at Mosley High School.

"They are all doing Red Cross aquatics," Pearce said.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Bay County Swimming Pool is offering swim lessons at \$35 for club members, \$40 for the community and \$50 for Baby and Me classes. For more information, call Kellie Mitchum at Boys & Girls Clubs of Bay County at 763-2076.

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