

Olympians Rowdy Gaines, Elizabeth Beisel, Visit Edwardsville YMCA As Part Of Make A Splash Tour, Work With Young Swimmers

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EDWARDSVILLE - Olympic medalists Rowdy Gaines and Elizabeth Beisel recently visited the Edwardsville YMCA as a part of the USA Swimming Foundation's Make A Splash tour, sponsored by Phillips Petroleum Corporation of Bartlesville, Okla., who runs the Wood River oil refinery, to teach young swimmers about the sport and water safety.

The Make A Splash tour is now in its 15th year of helping promote water safety and encourage both children and adults to learn how to swim to help prevent accidental drownings and as a lifesaving skill.

The tour started off in Houston on May 1-3 and also visited Lake Charles, La. on May 4-5 before visiting the Edwardsville and Roxana-Wood River areas May 14-16 and ended May 23-25 in Billings, Mont. Olympic medalist Cullen Jones, a two-time gold and silver medalist in Beijing in 2008 and London in 2012, was also featured on the tour.

Phillips Petroleum is a long time sponsor of USA Swimming and a big presence in the St. Louis area, through its Phillips 66 service stations.

"We are here for the Make A Splash tour, which is presented by Phillips 66, who is, of course, an integral part of this community," said Elaine Calio, the Senior Director of Development for the USA Swimming Foundation, the charitable arm of USA Swimming, "and also, a really pivotal sponsor for the foundation and for USA Swimming. We've been partners with them for over 50 years and each year, in the month of May, we pick three or four cities across the U.S., we come into town, we bring athletes, we try to make an impact with the schools, community rec centers, where we are right now, and teach people about the importance of water safety and learning how to swim, because it's summertime."

Gaines and Beisel helped teach the kids and other participants the fundamental skills of swimming. In the case of Gaines, a three-time gold medalist in swimming, a member of both the U.S. Olympic and International Swimming Hall of Fame and is currently lead swimming analyst for NBC Sports, feels a very close kinship with the YMCA.

"Being here at the Edwardsville Y is really cool," Gaines said, "because I'm a Y person myself. I worked for the YMCA for many years and they do many great things in the community. When Elizabeth and I were in the pool today, we saw that joy that water can bring to families. It breaks my heart when when it brings tragedy to families.

"I've seen that part of it, too, so it's something that I think we try to tell families to enjoy, like they did today, and watching the kids out there, it was amazing. But it's also something you should have a healthy respect for as well. That's what we try to teach, is have that respect, put your child in swim lessons and then love it, like I do. It's part of who I am as a human being."



Beisel, a silver medalist in 2012 and a bronze medalist in 2016, was very pleased to be a part of the event in Edwardsville and enjoyed working with the young swimmers.

"It's been an amazing event we've had here at the YMCA," Beisel said. "It's International Water Safety Day, so it couldn't have come at a better time. For us to come into these communities, work with the kids and teach them important lessons about being safer around the water is really what this is all about. For me being an Olympic athlete, it's really nice to drill home the messaging about learning how to swim as a lifesaving skill and that's a part of our mission."

Beisel really enjoys working with younger swimmers and it brings her much joy to help kids learn how to enjoy swimming.

"Working with the kids in the pool, I think, is one of the most rewarding experiences," Beisel said. "because sometimes, you get kids who aren't necessarily comfortable in the water. By the time you spend those 30, 45 or 60 minutes with them, they're dunking underwater, they're having fun, they're a little bit more comfortable," she said with a huge smile and laugh. "That's what it's really all about, it's just getting them a little bit safer in the water, a little bit safe around the water, having more fun in the water, especially with summer right around the corner."

Calio was very happy to bring the tour to both Roxana-Wood River and Edwardsville and praised the communities very highly.

"So Roxana and Edwardsville are are awesome towns," Calio said. "I think they're very representative of America. And we have met all kinds of really interesting people. We were at the refinery earlier today. I mean, that is a huge part of economy in this part of the country, part of the city. It's neat we can reach so many different types of people, because this type of work and this type of mission, it doesn't discriminate; it reaches everybody. So while we want to keep everybody safe, we want to impact these communities, we want, at the end of the day, to make sure that everybody in this town and beyond can keep spreading that mission of water safety.

"Because the USA Swimming Foundation is a part of USA Swimming, a lot of what I see on a day-by-day basis is very fast, elite level swimming," Calio continued. "So we see the Olympics, we see those elite caliber athletes. Sometimes, it's nice to pull back and see where it all starts. Because everybody, even the top, top athletes, they all learn how to swim at some point in their life. Hopefully, that's with a family member that can be a part of their experience, but a lot of times, it's just friend-to-friend and learning how to swim with a buddy. So it's really rewarding work, we love giving back. we're going to present a check to the YMCA here to help continue their work and help support them, because they're the ones serving the community and really doing the heavy lifting."



