

South Zone Report September 2022

I begin this report with the hardest part. The South Zone lost 2 of our finest since last year's convention. In December, Elise Lawton, head coach of the West Houston Bluebonnettes lost her husband of 60 years Don. He supported their team for decades, providing their facility (enclosed backyard pool), helping out especially with shows and allowed Elise to coach without charging fees, and in a variety of ways filling in when needed. In late June, Barbara McNamee lost her husband Bob after his courageous fight against that damn C word. Bob wasn't just Barb's husband, but was there for anything she needed, the Virginia Association needed, the collegiate world needed, our zone needed or anyone needed. At every meet, you could find him reading in a corner until something needed to be done and he'd jump in, whether it was scoring, or judging or something else. Dr. Bob was a quiet giant who will be sorely missed.

Once again, this season proved challenging for the South Zone. We celebrated those able to compete and cheered them on. We are excited about the AWD presence the south had at many meets including JO's. We are thankful to DEI VP Ashley Johnson for her continuing push for inclusion in our sport in so many areas and are encouraged by south zone clubs expanding their membership especially with male athletes and with athletes of all abilities.

While every club was still not able to 'fully compete in person' the entire year, our Zone Champs were held in Coral Springs, FL. Thanks to Ashley Johnson and her team of incredible volunteers for putting on a successful and safe meet for those able to attend. Congratulations to the Pirouettes of Texas who swept all high point categories: Overall, Jr & 13-15 High Point

Congratulations to the following special award winners presented at the Zone Champs:

Athlete Spirit Award: **Najla Brannin**, Palm Beach Coralytes

Coach of the Year: **Camille Albrecht**, Head Coach Florida Elite Synchro Warriors

Contributor of the Year: **Betsy Visniski Caza**, Head Coach University of Florida Gator Synchro

This summer, Maggie Downey, our zone scoring chair since 2010 decided to step down from this position. Luckily for us, just as her predecessor Dave Olson did, she found replacements to make this transition seamless. Our zone and national meets in the south have been 'scoring successes' due to Maggie's hard work, quietly behind the scenes, making sure everyone had what they needed with no fanfare. While we can't imagine a zone meet without her, we can't thank her enough for her service or thank her enough for grooming her replacements Jeanie Saunders and Rebecca Phillips and setting our zone up for continued success in the scoring realm, especially with all the changes that are coming (Welcome Jeanie & Rebecca!!!). Join me in thanking Maggie! She is just the best and will miss her terribly, but know she'll be there if we need anything. In addition, our longtime treasurer Jeanette Chase retired from the position as she continues in her life changes following the death of her husband last year before convention. Jeanette took care of us for so many years and we will all miss her inspiring spirit, but hope to see her at the pool or some event soon! We thank Cheryl Cook for jumping in as our new treasurer and working diligently to get us off on the right foot for this upcoming year.

As the season is just beginning for so many, we take a moment to wish all of our south zone masters athletes good luck and safe travels to their US Masters Championship! We thank them for always showing the rest of us how much fun our sport can still be and that Synchro is For Life/Artistic Swimming is For Life! Each masters athlete is an inspiration, whether it's swimming post-C word (or during C word!), post injury, while pregnant, whatever. We continue to be inspired by them all.

Special thanks to Betsy Caza and her fabulous folks for all they did to make this year's US JO's a success and to all the south zone clubs who made the coaches hospitality room a reality. We look forward to hosting our 2023 South Zone Champs in Hampton, VA at the new Aquaplex that will also serve as the site for the 2023 US Junior Olympics where southern hospitality will once again be on display. It should be a lot of fun presenting Artistic Swimming in a new facility for the first time.

As we await the governance changes we know are coming to determine what changes we need to make in our board makeup and USAAS committees, I'm also thankful to our Secretary Stephanie Sanchez and the South Zone board:

DEI Chair-Diana Wolff

Education Chair-Camille Albrecht

Officials Chair-Victoria Anderson

Technical Chair-Beth Moore

Treasurer-Cheryl Cook

Athlete Reps: Najla Brannin, Post Grad Rep, Emma Kim, Sr Rep, Veronica Holguin, Jr Rep

Respectfully submitted,
Carole Mitchell

