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Class schedule filling up for Poway swim instructor, whose friendly style puts students at ease

By **Kevin Gemmell**

UNION-TRIBUNE COMMUNITY SPORTS WRITER

August 11, 2006

POWAY – Patience. The word keeps popping up when people talk about swim instructor Mike Morrill. It's a virtue, indeed, especially for Morrill, who teaches students of all ages, some as young as 5 months.

Morrill's name might ring a bell to Powegians who were around in the late '80s and early '90s when he was a two-time All-America water polo player at Poway High. Now he's taking those pool skills and passing them on to a younger generation.

"I grew up as a very active kid," said Morrill, 32. "By today's standards I would have been considered hyperactive so when I see some really energetic kids, I feed off of that and remember how I was when I was younger. I think that's where my patience comes

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from.”

Morrill and his wife Karyn run their business, Floaties Swim School, out of their Poway home. Complete with backyard restrooms, locker rooms and a slew of magazines for moms and dads to read while their children learn to stay afloat, the home has all the trimmings of a commercial facility with a family-friendly atmosphere.

“We tried other places, but we really fell in love with Mike's philosophy and approach,” said Kellie Spring, a Mount Helix resident whose 19-month-old daughter Addison works with Morrill. “Other schools sort of push the kids. But Mike knows the fine line of getting the best out of them while also having fun.”

After a stellar career at Poway High, Morrill went on to play at Grossmont College, where he earned All-America honors again. He was selected to the Junior Olympic squad before bad shoulders sidetracked his polo career.

While attending education classes at San Diego State, Morrill worked as a lifeguard but never considered teaching until the military stepped in. While serving as a pool manager at Miramar, when it was still a Navy base, Morrill was asked to teach some of the recruits to swim so they could pass their water-efficiency test. He was hooked.

Morrill began teaching throughout the county, actually going door-to-door for a couple of years.

“That's how we got the name Floaties,” explained Karyn. “He was just floating from pool to pool.”

So they decided to start up the business at their home.

“People would tell me 20 times a day how patient he is with kids and we wanted to find a way to help service more clients,” Karyn said. “We found that this area was really an untapped market for swim instruction.”

With demand for his services high, Morrill is hoping to open a commercial facility, likely along state Route 56, within the next couple of years. But neither Mike nor Karyn wants to lose the family atmosphere that has made Floaties a success with kids and parents.

“When we come here, it's like going to a friend's house,” said Mission Hills resident Lauri Brennan, whose 22-month-old daughter Brooke takes multiple classes. “He knows how to grow with the kids and adapt to every age.”

Morrill doesn't play up his water polo achievements. When he met Karyn, who hails from Dallas, she didn't even know what water polo was and the moms around the pool couldn't care less. However, when dads come to class with their kids, it becomes a hot topic.”

Floaties swim school

Owners: Mike and Karyn Morrill of Poway. Mike is a former Poway High water polo player and high school All-American.

What: Swim instruction for all ages.

Phone: (877) 277-SWIM.

Information: Prices and schedules available on the Web at floatiesswimschool.com



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“I think it means a little more to them because they tell their friends their kid is being taught by a former All-American,” Morrill said. “It's neat, and it's something I'm proud of. But it's not a huge selling point for me.”

Morrill recently introduced his son Nash to the water at 4 weeks old. Karyn was a bit nervous, but like every other parent whose kid attends Floaties, she put her faith in Mike.

“Every time I see him working with kids, I just fall in love with him all over again,” Karyn said. “He's so good at it and he loves it. That's the most important part.”

■ Kevin Gemmell: (619) 718-5304; kevin.gemmell@uniontrib.com

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