

OKOBOJI



RUTH ANN BURKE, LINNEA LAMBERT, DELORES MASER,
JODY VAN KLEY, JULIE ROTH, DEBORAH CLARK

'WOMEN WE ADMIRE' HAVE

Seasonal significance



SWIMMING PROGRAM
MAKES BIG SPLASH

WRAP UP A LIGHTER
VERSION OF LUNCH

APRIL 2017

VOLUME 30 | NO. 2 | \$4.95





SPECIAL

38 BIG SPLASH

Swim program combines wellness, achievement and recreation into one package for kids with special needs

IN EVERY ISSUE

8 EDITOR'S VIEW

Season for spring cleaning

42 LETTUCE FRESHEN UP LUNCH

Skip the carb-heavy shells you're accustomed to. Instead, wrap your meaty fillings in a sturdy lettuce leaf

47 OKBOJI TOUR

New faces in some key positions

48 LOOK AROUND THE LAKES

Theatre upgrades, hotel renovations, hospital awards and adieu to a long-time Iowa Great Lakes benefactor

ON THE COVER

Photo from Okoboji Magazine Instagram
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYLAN HOWE

FOLLOW US ON
INSTAGRAM! 



OKOBOJI Magazine is dedicated to an upscale, fun-filled midstates lifestyle, exemplified by the homes, activities and traditions that make up the Iowa Great Lakes. The magazine is distributed in northwestern Iowa, southwestern Minnesota, eastern South Dakota and eastern Nebraska. We welcome suggestions, story ideas and letters to the editor.

founder and publisher

Peter W. Wagner

president

Jeff Wagner

editor

Myrna Wagner

sales

Dave Stanley

writing team

Kate Harlow
Rylan Howe

editorial design

Briana Harrell

advertising design

Dawn Cermak
Kristin Oldenkamp
Krystal Poppema

photography

Josh Harrell
Rylan Howe

OKOBOJI

APRIL 2017

VOLUME 30 | NO. 2 | \$4.95

OKOBOJI Magazine is published seven times a year by Iowa Information, Inc., Sheldon, Iowa.

For advertising rates and other questions, please contact us.

Okoboji Magazine
PO Box 160, Sheldon IA 51201
800-247-0186 | 712-324-5347
Fax (712) 324-2345
okoboji@iowainformation.com

Write or call if you would like to subscribe to OKOBOJI Magazine. A one-year subscription costs \$20.

©2017 OKOBOJI Magazine
No material from this publication may be copied or in any way reproduced without written permission from the publisher.

Okobojimag.com

'Boji's BIG Splash

NON-PROFIT PROMOTES WELLNESS BENEFITS OF WATER

Splashes and smiles — both were in abundance recently at the Bedell Family YMCA in Spirit Lake. They came from the students, teachers and associates from Okoboji Elementary participating in the Big Splash program.

Big Splash Inc. was founded by Karen Taylor Burton in 2007 with a stated mission of “promoting wellness, recreation and personal achievement in students with special needs by providing adapted instructional swimming and aquatic therapy in a positive, supportive environment.”

Burton is a native of the Okoboji area and brought the program to the Iowa Great Lakes upon embarking on her semi-retirement.

The Spirit Lake School District began participating in the program in October and the Okoboji School District jumped in just one month later.

The YMCA was quick to join the program as well.

“We’ve always had a strong partnership with the local

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYLAN HOWE



Sara Myers encourages kindergarten student Emmet Nelson. Kindergarten student Sophia Winkowitsch swims with a kickboard. Emma Lux helps pre-k student Bentley Rowland learn the backstroke. Big Splash, Inc. president Karen Taylor Burton relays some instructions.



school districts,” said Andrew Fisher, CEO of the Bedell Family YMCA. “When Karen came and approached us about adaptive swimming, it was really a no-brainer with her knowledge and passion and established partnerships. We hope it’s a program we can continue for years and years.”

‘Results are visible’

Burton’s experience with adapted aquatic education goes back more than 40 years to her time working with the state board of education in Illinois. Her program in Sioux City has served an estimated 2,000 students since its inception a decade ago.

She hopes to see the same success in the Iowa Great Lakes where the Big Splash program already counts more than 40 students now that Okoboji Middle School has started as well.

“The approach of the programming is something I developed long ago and can

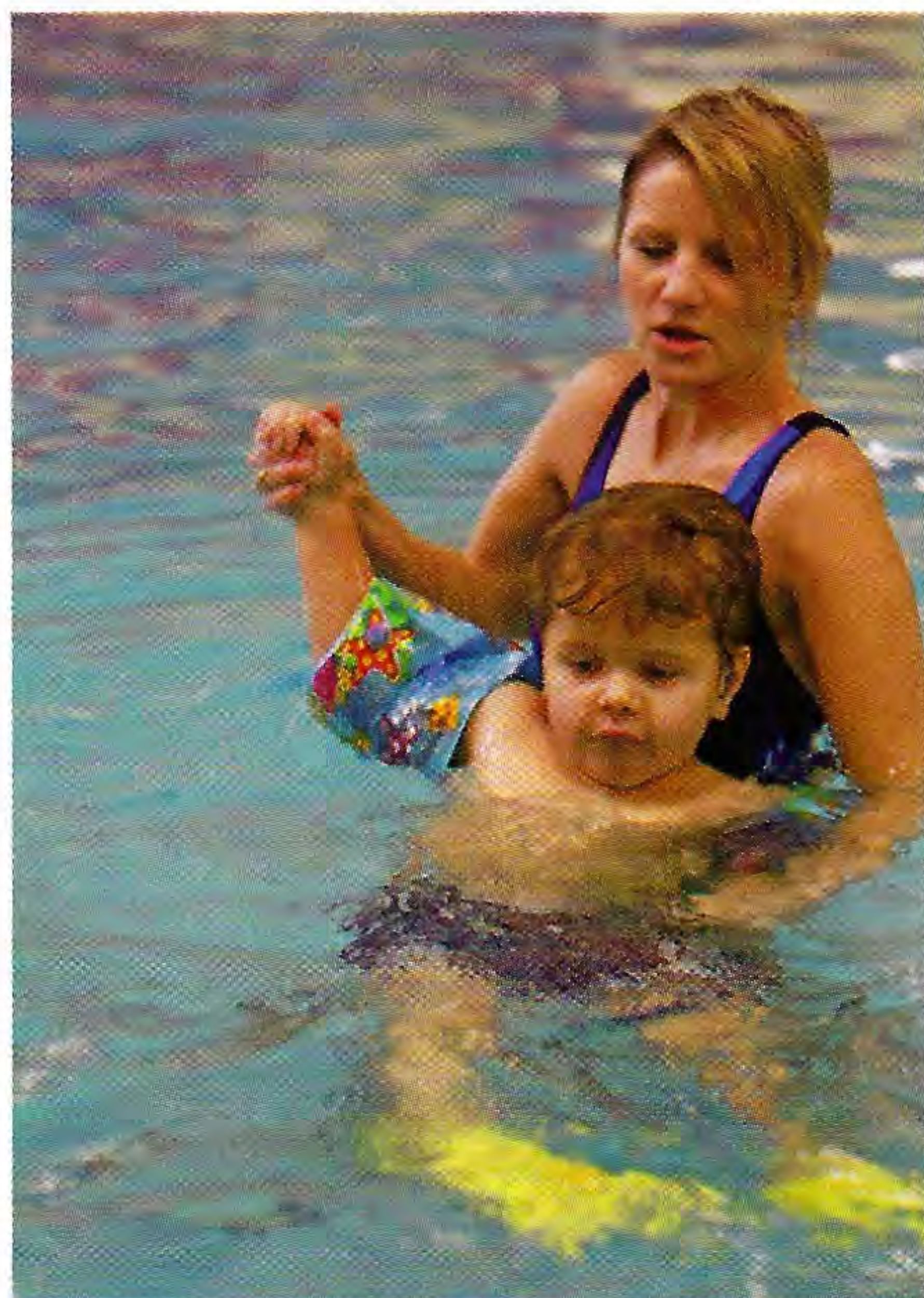
be adapted for specific needs of individual students,” Burton said. “Water helps unlock so much for them and the results are visible – very quickly making an impact in the classroom and in their lives.”

The impact in the classroom has been readily apparent to the teachers at Okoboji Elementary. Principal Justin Bouse and Okoboji superintendent Todd Abrahamson have even stopped by to watch the program up close and have been im-

pressed by the progress shown by the students who participate.

“Big Splash is more than just swimming; it is an opportunity for students to understand the skills and to implement those skills as a swimmer,” Abrahamson said. “But more importantly, an opportunity to enhance their motor skills and build social skills as they work with their peers, staff and teachers. It is an awesome program.”

Okoboji Elementary teacher Tracie Lux works on the backstroke with pre-kindergarten student Micah Crouch. The staff has seen better focus in the classroom after starting Big Splash.



Bouse added his excitement about the Big Splash program.

“There is a lot of research that shows that swimming can have a positive impact on a child’s educational experience, and we have seen that already,” Bouse said. “Not only are the children learning some valuable life skills, but the fact that they are able to swim right away has had a positive impact on the rest of their school day.

“After swimming, the kids are calmer and able to focus more on the instruction they receive back in the building,” he said. “The children are so excited on swimming days, and their level of self-confidence has grown since we implemented this program.”

‘Seeing huge gains’

The Okoboji Elementary students enjoying the program range from prekindergarten to third grade.

Early childhood development instructor Tracie Lux, self-contained with integration teacher Alyssa Umscheid and several teacher’s associates, make their way to the YMCA along with the students two mornings each week.

“We’re seeing huge gains after therapy



sessions. We're super fortunate that the district allows us the opportunity to do this," Umscheid said. "Water therapy is a life skill. These kids need to not be afraid of water and respect water living in the Lakes area."

After a little warming up, out come the kickboards, backpacks and floaters. While the butterfly, freestyle, breaststroke and backstroke are all taught to the students, the terminology is a bit different.

Burton and the teachers emphasize "circle arms," "pushing the water away" and "reaching for the sky."

After going through all four strokes, the students get the opportunity to practice jumping into the water.

One example of the progress the students quickly make came from one boy who early on could barely bring himself to enter the pool. Now he smiles and eagerly launches himself, cannonball-style, into the water time and time again.

"Those moments are the greatest payoff for all that they're doing," Burton said. "The confidence and poise they show after they get in the water is clear and precise, then in the classroom it's a ripple effect. They go back calmer and on task."

more relaxed and focused and staying on task longer when they get back to the classroom.

"It's incredible. They look forward to it every time we get in the car. We're so thankful for Karen and what she did bringing this program to the area," Umscheid said. "We also have to thank the water aerobics class. We've kind of invaded their space and they've been great and have been able to see the progress the kids make for themselves as well."

Burton said the goal is for the program to continue in perpetuity. She trains the teachers and associates and will stop by for a refresher perhaps at the beginning of each semester.

For Burton, her biggest hope is that it will gain steam and open doors to other school districts and cities in the area.

"I would love to see every school in the nation have a program like this, and I'm hopeful that the state of Iowa will be the leader," Burton said.

For now, two school districts in the Iowa Great Lakes have taken full advantage of the program and are seeing immediate benefits for their students. ■

The teachers have seen it up close and personal the past several weeks.

"It's really neat to see these kiddos that were so nervous in the water before now just so relaxed," Umscheid said. "The smiles on their faces give you goose bumps."

'It's incredible'

Both Umscheid and Lux related that they have seen students formerly non-compliant now easily following instructions. Students with high anxiety are now

Teachers and associates work with students in the pool at the Bedell Family YMCA in Spirit Lake during a Big Splash, Inc. swimming session. Both Spirit Lake and Okoboji school districts utilize the program.

"It's incredible.

They look forward to it every time we get in the car. We're **so thankful** for Karen and what she did bringing this program to the area."

— ALYSSA UMSCHIED