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Women in Training

Group of local friends prepares for Danskin triathlon

Eva Sanders remembers her first Danskin Triathlon well. Before she could even compete, she had to learn to swim.

So her friend and co-worker Debbie Burley, who'd persuaded Sanders to train for the all-women swim, bike and run event in 2000, took her out to Canyon Lake for her first swimming lesson. About 200 feet out, Sanders began to scream "I'm in deep water, I'm in deep water!"

"She was pretty excited, just to be out there," Burley remembers. "It was pretty awesome."

Little by little, with the help of Burley, she learned the basic swimming strokes. She rode her bike for miles. She jogged every day.

"And I did it, I finished the race," Sanders said. "And I was ecstatic and I was hooked."

Sanders and Burley are just two of the dozen or so San Marcos women set to compete in the Danskin Triathlon again next month in Austin. Both Sanders and Burley, employees at Central Texas Medical Center, have done their best to tell others about the triathlon, building a network of local friends working together to get fit — and gain a huge helping of self confidence along the way.

"It's very empowering for women to be active and complete a goal, to do things they never thought they would be able to," Burley said. "(The race) has given me more confidence in all aspects of my life... For every woman who does this, it's a life changing event."

The Austin Danskin race, set for June 7 - 8 at Decker Lake, benefits the National Association of TEAM Survivor, a program that provides group exercise and support programs for cancer patients, and the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. Individual participants complete three athletic disciplines: a half-mile of swimming, 12 miles of biking and three miles of running.

A friend of Burley's introduced her to the Danskin triathlon 12 years ago. She was trying to lose weight, so figured training for the event would help. And it did. She says it's important for her to tell others about the Danskin, and has helped several co-workers with their swimming techniques every year.

"Somebody knows something about the race, and they pass it onto someone else. I'm kind of the swim guru for the most part. That's the big thing that everyone is afraid of," Burley said. "So I'll go out and help a lot of the local women with their swimming techniques."

Sanders said that after her first race, she couldn't wait to get back to San Marcos and tell all her friends what she'd witnessed.

"I got to the race and I looked around and thought 'there's older people than me here, there's heavy people. If they can do it, I sure can do it,'" Sanders said. "And to see the look on everyone's face when they finish, that's really great."

Kelly Holden, of San Marcos, just likes the idea of working to being physically fit. She, like many other women at CTMC, was talked into competing in the Danskin by Sanders several years ago. It was a handshake she couldn't back out of.

"It's intimidating at first, when you first start training. You see this huge hill you have to climb on your bike," Holden said. "But it's all about being healthy, building your confidence. And that comes with practicing."

Burley said that this race is empowering for all women, but especially those in their 40s, 50s and above, those who had long dismissed the idea of sports and exercise.

"After you get out of grade school, or running around the play ground, sports were never really something for us (women)," Burley said. "We were kind of shoved another way. Sports gives you so much more confidence in yourself. All of us being together and achieving our dreams, it's important."

And that's exactly what these local women are doing: Training, overachieving and sharing a few laughs along the way.

"Trust me, you get to know someone really well running

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Friends and Danskin triathlon veterans from left are Sue Noyes, Debbie Burley, Brandi Blair, Millie Cruz, Eva Sanders and Kelly Holden. The women have been training together on a regular basis for the race in June. **None/** (Click for larger image)

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together for three hours at a time," Burley said.

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Where: Near Decker Lake, Austin

What it is: The all-women race includes a half-mile of swimming, 12 miles of biking and three miles of running

Who it benefits: Proceeds from the race go toward the National Association of TEAM Survivor and the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.



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Friends and Danskin triathlon veterans from left are Sue Noyes, Debbie Burley, Brandi Blair, Millie Cruz, Eva Sanders and Kelly Holden. The women have been training together on a regular basis for the race in June.