

13 July 2018

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Greetings!

Since everyone has the weekend off from Mere Mortals, we wanted to take an opportunity to share the rich history of Tri Gulf Coast and the Mere Mortals Triathlon Training Program. Whether you realize it or not, you are part of a lasting legacy on Pensacola Beach for the better part of 22 years. As the club has grown, we've made a point to continue to give back to the Pensacola Beach community. We're extremely proud to still be a noticeable, positive presence on the island. And we're happy to be able to continue to introduce new adult and youth athletes to the sport.



Thank you!

Teresa J. Hess
TGC President
& The TGC Board

**Mere Mortals: The History
by Tom Henderson**



In 1995, Pensacola suffered a direct hit from two hurricanes in less than 60 days. Erin made landfall in August and Opal in October. These two storms had serious impacts on the beach, and in 1996, the Santa Rosa Island Authority was looking for new events to attract visitors back to our

beaches.

One of the ideas they considered was a triathlon. After discussing the idea with Ann Knight and her Co-director Janet Boylan, the Santa Rosa Island Triathlon was born!

When race day arrived, a cold front swept through and a few hundred triathletes shivered on the shore waiting for the gun to start. When it did, it became clear to Ann and Janet that most of the athletes were attempting the race without much advance training and preparation. This concerned them so much that they resolved to provide training opportunities the following year leading up to the race. Janet offered to manage the training, and Ann's husband Charlie Knight stepped in to help with co-directing the race. It was Janet who picked the perfect name for a group of normal people trying to prepare for their first ever triathlon: **The Mere Mortals**.

Over a few weeks leading up to the race, aspiring triathletes would meet on Casino Beach and swim, bike, and run slightly longer each weekend until they had built up to the distances of the SRI Tri. Most weekends the crowd was between 15-30 people.

After the first successful year, word spread about the group, and each year more folks would join in. At the same time, some of those who had become proficient and even competitive in the sport would still come to Mere Mortals. They weren't there for the workout, which was often



Chris Hickman, 2000 mere mortals.

far less than they needed. They were there to support friends they had invited, share their love of the sport, and to re-live their own discovery of the sport.

In 1999, the idea of creating a local Tri Club was brought up. The very first meeting of the club was held on October 17th, 1999 at the Hampton Inn on Pensacola Beach. So began Tri Gulf Coast!

By 2000, SRI Tri had grown exponentially, becoming exactly the sort of destination event the SRIA had hoped it would. Ann, Janet, and Charlie had their hands full managing the race, and it was proposed that in addition to all the normal things a Tri Club does, the new club would take over managing the Mere Mortals.

Over the years a number of people took turns as the Mere Mortals Coordinator. Janet Boylan, Chris Hickman, Steven Fair, Patrick Osborne, Tom Henderson, Stephen Hancock, Rob Zimmerman, Paolo Ghio, and now Danika Turner have all served in this capacity.

Over time, Mere Mortals added more to the program. Jay Yanovich began coming out each year to do a presentation about rules. Local bike shop owners shared instructions on bike maintenance and changing a flat tire. At first, we begged for presenters to come out and join us, but as time went on and the crowds grew, the presenters began to come to us asking for a chance to speak. Eventually there was enough demand that we had to limit speaking opportunities to businesses that sponsored Tri Gulf Coast.

In the early days, we met in the parking lot, parking together to block off a section of the lot to put our transition area. We swam in the Gulf while the new fishing pier was being constructed nearby. We biked to Fort Pickens and back, because that was the original course used by SRI Tri. And after our run, people would drag coolers from their cars and share fresh fruit and snacks with each other. Some weekends, Charlie Knight would set up a complete portable omelet station and serve custom omelets to anyone who wanted one!

At about the time we started having 50-60 participants on a regular basis, we were big enough that the Island Authority asked us to begin applying for event permission each year. We continued to add equipment including bike racks, water safety equipment, buoys, tents, coolers, a race clock, a PA system, signs and a trailer to hold it all. We began to hold a practice race that eventually included professional timing! What used to be handled by one person with a small open trailer now takes 15 or more volunteers and year round planning



Post-workout mimosas freshly prepared.



Mere Mortals early 2000s in the parking lot.



Parking lot grilling.



Charlie and his omelet station.



*Grace coaching the swim in 2000.
Note the pier under construction.*

to maintain. Participation now exceeds 150 athletes per session most weeks.



*Left: Tom Deagan, early water safety and wild-life deterrent.
Right: An early Member's Only Triathlon at Blue Angel Park in 2005.*

The Mere Mortals training program, an included perk of Tri Gulf Coast membership, is essentially free and one of the largest club based training groups in the country. It's all been by word of mouth with the support of dedicated volunteers and gracious sponsors. Whether it's been as a participant, volunteer, board member, or coordinator, thanks for doing your part to make Mere Mortals a successful program!



Tom Henderson
TGC Vice President

This email was sent to all past and present TGC Members. Use the links below if you would like to renew your membership, volunteer during Mere Mortals, or volunteer during a Youth Event.

Tri Gulf Coast Membership	Mere Mortals Volunteer	Youth Events Volunteer
President@TriGulfCoast.org	VicePresident@TriGulfCoast.org	Mindi@TriGulfCoast.org

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