



Ted working on his mosaics in the early years

Remembering ISHOF Artist & Diving Coach Ted Keller

01/13/25 - 04/18/12

Ted Keller became involved with the International Swimming Hall of Fame in the early 1960's when he met Buck Dawson on the pool deck of the Casino Pool. Early on, Buck came down to Fort Lauderdale with the University of Michigan and Matt Mann to the College Swim Forum at Christmas. Buck and Ted got to know one another through the years and once Dawson moved to Fort Lauderdale to accept the job as ISHOF's first Executive Director, Keller was a natural fit. As an artist, Ted was just what ISHOF needed in the early days. He and Buck spent days, weeks and years creating what was to become the ISHOF Museum. Keller's talents knew no limits and he could create in any medium. From his aquatic mosaic tiles that hung on the walls of the pool deck and the auditorium entrance, to his hand crafted diving awards that people still covet, he was able to sketch, water color, create sculpture and excel in photography. Keller could do it all! He even created several aquatic awards for the Hall of Fame.

Ted was Fort Lauderdale's head diving coach beginning at the Casino Pool in 1956, moving to the Hall of Fame Pool upon its completion where he stayed until his retirement in 1984. Originally the team was known as FLSA, the Fort Lauderdale Swimming Association and later changed to FLDT, the Fort Lauderdale Diving Team. Although Keller was technically a "part-time" diving coach, his talent and dedication helped build a dynasty of age group divers for Fort Lauderdale, who won numerous national championships in all groups. He was named the American Swimming Coaches Association's Age Group Diving Coach of the Year in 1969; the College Swim Coaches Outstanding Contributor, December, 1969; the 1970 National AAU Age Group Coach of the Year; the Diving Coach of the Year for the School Board of Broward County, 1971; won the AAU Jr. Olympic National Championship Award in August 1971; and was named the AAU's Outstanding Contributor, in July 1975.



Bob Webster, Ted Keller and Brent Musberger of CBS at the International Diving Meet.

Ted became the local manager of ISHOF's International Diving Meets which began the tradition of bringing the greatest divers in the world to Fort Lauderdale each May. The tradition continues today and is now known as the FINA Diving Grand Prix. In the early years, the diving meet's highlight was the evening water show which Keller emceed many times. Keller even helped with television when CBS Sports televised the International Meets, working with sportscaster, Brent Musberger and Bobby Webster.

When the YMCA National Championships came to Fort Lauderdale, Keller organized the diving portion of the event. At Christmas, he welcomed the college athletes and was the local coordinator of the diving events for the College Swim Forum. Keller always had the help of diving friends, like Dick Steadman, Bim Stults and many others.

Upon Keller's retirement in 1985, he and his wife, Diana, picked up and moved to Ashland, Oregon. Retirement provided free time Keller that never had in Fort Lauderdale. He spent years writing stories, many of which were early memories of ISHOF, the Casino pool and Fort Lauderdale. Ted stays in close touch with the happenings of ISHOF through his daughter, Meg Keller-Marvin, who has been working for ISHOF for more than 20 years now. We've included a couple of Ted's stories for your enjoyment:

An Intro to the Hall of Fame

Let's flash, or should I say splash, back to the early sixties where, not unlike today, the world was experiencing a variety of ups and downs. This was especially true with the young divers that were under my command at the popular Casino pool on Fort Lauderdale Beach. Oh, they crashed now and then but truly enjoyed the companionship and challenges of the springboard. The year was 1961, and thoughts of a huge swimming and diving complex ran through the minds of aquatic leaders, city politicians, and especially those who had kids addicted to competitive water sports. "Why don't we bid on the International Swimming Hall of Fame that is looking for a place to start up?" And the seed was planted... we should note here that



Bim Stults, Frank Dempsey, Ted Keller, Ted Bitondo, Dick Rydze and Dick Steadman



Keller as lifeguard and coach

during the same year, the first manned spacecraft splashed down in the ocean off Fort Lauderdale. Actually it was closer to Grand Bahamas. The astronaut and the fellow who jumped in from a rescue helicopter to help him, came to visit us several years later at ISHOF. They were college swim team buddies, but that is another story. We have a million of them, well a few anyway!

There were so many people that contributed to the success of the Swimming Hall of Fame that we should never attempt to single out any one individual, so I'll name five! G. Harold Martin and his citizens committee, three mayors, Malcolm Carlisle, Ed Burry and M.R. Young and Coach Tom Lamar.....

These opening remarks are not intended to flatter some worthy participants in this world landmark, but to lead the way into my recollections of the December 27, 1966 ground breaking ceremony followed the next night with the "Greatest Water Show on Earth!" And we had the stars to back it up!

The ISHOF Extravaganza



The stars came from all over the country and the majority of spectators were either tourists or local folks. That pretty well describes Fort Lauderdale's make up of this event being held in late December 1966, where folks from New York and Canada might have outnumbered the hometown crowd. Tourist season, you know! The town doubles, even triples.

This morning, the Miami Herald displayed a fine picture of Johnny Weissmuller, Beulah Gundling and Max Ritter, along with a glowing account of the evening's entertainment which might easily outshine Billy Rose's Aqua Follies, but don't say that in front of Eleanor Holm.....

Buster Crabbe, formerly Tarzan, Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon of the cinema, gave a magnificent performance, which he always liked to do, floating on his back, a spouting of one whale, two whales, three whales, but was stopped by the announcer before he showed the fourth spouting whale! This little display followed his "Evolution of Swimming!"

George Gordon Hyde who has been around and performing aquatic stunts longer than he would like to remember yelled to me, the announcer, as he jumped into the pool to do his "stick" as he called it. "And don't try this at home folks". After swimming across the pool under water he performed the human fly trick, without the aid of mask or equipment, George walked up the side of the pool, smoking a pipe!

Please don't ask me how he did it..... I announce only, with no questions asked or answered.

The show continued with remarkable performances by the famous and not so famous. Weissmuller and some of the swimmers that worked in the Tarzan movies were introduced, and Johnny also described the water antics of Adolph Kiefer, Olympic champion backstroker. Fort Lauderdale's champion life guard team, under the direction of Lucky Jordan, performed a unique three-man line and can rescue race. Vic Sobles, famous Ice Follies clown diving performer brought the house down with his shenanigans on the 3-meter. This act was followed by world champion springboard and tower divers. George Hery and Dick Kimball both showing us triple somersaults on the trampoline. Soon after Bill Barton was racing Demetri Rebikoff's Pegasus submarine, in an underwater race.

Two hours never went by any faster as everyone screamed in delight, one act after another.

Just about one week later, ground breaking ceremonies took place, and the new museum between the pools and the Intracoastal Waterway was underway!



Ted Keller with his mosaic on the pool deck

The 1939 World's Fair

As I recall, my two friends, Drexler and Fanning, joined me on a day trip to the New York World's Fair. I had Fanning convinced that I ordered the cab and would gladly take care of the fare. He was very impressed as we glided across the bridge in the back seat of the fancy yellow cab, until big mouth Drexler told him that my Dad was driving. But I got even!

Even at my tender age, although with little talent, I was impressed with aquatics. So on our arrival, I headed my motley crew of three to Billy Rose's Aquacade and the famous Aquafemmes. Next to the fancy diving, this group of about 30 young ladies pleased me the most. "They are called synchronized swimmers," I informed my two buddies. "Where's Weissmuller and Buster Crabbe", they asked, being too young to appreciate the young beauties splashing around in the Olympic sized pool. Not even the most famous, Eleanor Holm, star of the extravaganza could sway them from the questions. "Where's Tarzan and Flash Gordon?" (Johnny and Buster!) And would you believe almost 50 years later, my daughter, Meg sent me a picture of herself with two aquatic greats, one being, Eleanor Holm!



Keller hanging his mosaic tiles in ISHOF's auditorium entrance.

