

She rides championship crest while overcoming rare disease

By Tom Baor
staff writer

Beverly Cornell out of the swimming pool after one of her daily workouts. She'll manage just fine on her own, thank you.

And don't be running ahead of her wheelchair to open the door which leads out of the pool. She can handle that one, too, with a quick thrust of her left leg against the door.

Beverly Cornell, a 37-year-old Farmington Hills housewife with a degenerative bone disease which caused her right leg to be amputated, feels that swimming — both recreational and competitive — has saved her from an invalid's life and given her a way to chase away the blues.

"I don't drive," Cornell said. "Someone always has to take me. I can even do all my housework by myself. But swimming's different. It's a neat independence I don't have in everyday life."

This high-spirited blonde needed no help last weekend when she earned five gold medals in the Michigan Wheelchair Athletic Association state regional finals at Wayne State University.

She shattered her own state records in the 100-yard freestyle (1:25.7) and the 100-yard backstroke (1:39.62), while setting state standards in the 500-yard freestyle (8:33.2) and the 200-yard freestyle relay (4:22.33 with Farmington's Jim Boyd, Keego Harbor's Karen Donaldson and Franklin Village's Harry Allen). Cornell's other first came in the 100 breaststroke (2:38.44).

Cornell's performances earned her a trip to the association's nationals May 22-26 in Johnson City, Tenn.

CORNELL'S INTEREST in swimming goes back even before the disease — now known as polyostotic fibrosis

dysplasia — struck her at age 7.

The ailment "takes good bone and turns the whole bone into marrow, leaving thin cortex or no cortex at all, which makes me very breakable," Cornell said.

About four months ago, she lost her leg to the disease. Now she has learned that it has spread to her spinal column, causing some back pain.

"I have the worst case of this disease in the United States," she said. "Usually, it doesn't progress to other limbs."

Not much is known about the disease. "They just named it, this disease, just recently," Cornell said. "Every orthopedist has changed the name of whatever it is I have. They've consolidated different bone diseases to come up with this name."

Cornell, who gets around on crutches as well as a wheelchair, learned to swim at age 2. "I guess I never realized that it would be my life-support," she said.

"Without swimming, I would not be as mobile as I am. Because of the back, my muscle tone from the waste up is like a rock. Swimming keeps me so I can sit, stand and use my crutches."

Cornell swims lengths for an hour every morning at OCC's pool, and works out several nights a week with a master's group in Birmingham. "I'm the only handicapped person there, but I can keep up," she said, her pride showing.

CORNELL CALLED swimming a "frustration outlet" and "an escape from the bone disease for awhile."

"This bone disease to me is very frustrating at times because of the limitations," she said, "but when I'm swimming lengths, I just get into a state of euphoria. I can forget that I hurt."

"Most of the time, I'm in pain — not always; the amputation reduced a lot of the pain, but the back tends to be very painful, and so does the left hip and knee."

"I've survived 24 operations, and every orthopedist who has operated on me has said that the reason I've come out so well is that I swim. My heart rate is nice, also my blood pressure and body temperature."

But why add the rigors of competition? "It's in my blood to compete," Cornell said. "I love the excitement and the gas on the back from other people when I do so well."

"I have these gold medals here. No one else could do this for me. I had to



'This bone disease to me is very frustrating at times because of the limitations. But when I'm swimming lengths, I just get into a state of euphoria. I can forget that I hurt.'
— Beverly Cornell

Keeping track of her swimming accomplishments is part of the fun for Beverly Cornell. Here she marks off the first 50 miles of winter training season. She hopes to swim another 50 before spring.



RANDY DORST/REAP photographer

Swimming for an hour a day has helped to turn Beverly Cornell's life from one of pain to proud accomplishment.



A big smile crosses the face of Beverly Cornell while she displays the five medals she won at a recent meet.

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INSIDE ANGLES

Know someone doing something notable? Let us know. Write: Inside Angles, Farmington Observer, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

AREA RESIDENTS will have a chance to give a gift from the heart with a blood donation from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 29, at North Farmington High School, 32900 13 Mile Road. For an appointment, call William Bunker, 626-2511. Blood can be donated by anyone in good health between the ages of 17 and 65 who weighs at least 110 pounds.

TOASTMISTRESS Phyllis Sullivan, the woman who is working to bring a new chapter of Toastmasters International into the area for Livonia and Farmington residents, has the date and time set for the first organizational meeting. She's taking reservations now for those who want to learn what Toastmasters is all about for 6 p.m. Thursday, March 22, in Monaghan Council Knight of Columbus Hall, 19801 Farmington Road. She can be reached by calling 455-1635.

ARTRAIN, the nation's only travelling art museum housed in railroad cars, will be in Detroit from March 6-9. It will be just east of the Renaissance Center at the SEMTA railroad tracks at Atwater Street. The exhibitions, which open the 1984 touring season, are "Creative Impulse" and "State of the Art." This exhibition is of particular interest and importance to the Detroit audience because more than half the artists represented in "State of the Art" are residents of the Detroit area. In addition to the galleries, there will be demonstrating artists from both Artrain's staff and the Detroit area. Gallery guides will be on hand to provide information and answer questions. The galleries are open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and admission is free. Anyone interested in group tour information or volunteering should call Artrain Inc. at 851-2910.

DUE to unseasonable weather, the Blue Cross/Blue Shield cross country ski race has been cancelled. The race had been scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 26, at Independence Oaks County Park near Clarkston.

DR. DAN GREENBERG, a communication, arts and technology instructor at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College, will discuss "The Film as Social History" for the Farmington Historical Society Wednesday, Feb. 22. The meeting will begin at 8 p.m. in the Farmington

downtown library. Greenberg was the business manager for Channel 56 while he completed his doctorate in radio-TV-film at Wayne State University. He also earned a master's in theatre at WSU, and a bachelor of arts in English from the University of Michigan.

MATTHEW A. SPEAR, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas G. Spear of Farmington Hills and a senior at Harrison High School, was appointed to the Air Force Academy.

LORRAINE KAMINSKI, Chris Walker, David Livingstone, Nancy Ellen Prochaska and Nancy Walker have been named to the dean's list at Western Michigan University. To be eligible, students must have compiled at least a 3.5 grade point average in at least 14 hours of graded class work.

THOMAS A. DUKE JR. has been awarded the Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) designation by the Realtors National Marketing Institute, an affiliate of the National Association of Realtors. The CCIM designation is awarded only to highly specialists who draw from market experience and intensive study to help clients analyze and meet investment objectives. Duke's firm is Thomas A. Duke Jr., Broker on Northwestern Highway in Farmington Hills. He is a past president of the Western Wayne and Oakland County Board of Realtors and a director of the Michigan Association of Realtors. He is also a director of the Metropolitan National Bank of Farmington and a director of the Farmington Chamber of Commerce.

FICTION LOVERS and librarians will be gathering at a workshop Thursday-Friday, March 15-16, to hear writers and publishers talk about fiction. Anyone may sign up to learn more about fiction specialties. Marshall Tymn, Richard Douglas, John Saul, Kathryn Falk, Ruth Langdon and Loren Estleman will speak about their fields in the fiction publishing world. Extending over two days, the "Fantasie Fiction Festival" will be the Sheraton-Oaks-Nov. Tickets for the Thursday evening banquet with Saul, who wrote The God Project and Birds of Prey, can be bought without a festival registration. A full banquet ticket is \$20, or you can attend Saul's banquet talk without the meal for \$5. One-day registrations are \$25. Two-day registrations are \$50. Michigan Library Association members may register for less. For further information, call Michael Deller at the Madison Heights Public Library, 588-2029, or Christine Hage at the Avon Township Public Library, 651-1446.

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