

# Adult swimmers conquer challenge

By Julie Brown  
Staff writer

It's never too late to get in the swim. Debbie Zarish and Eileen Garlick can attest to that. The two Novi residents finished up an advanced beginner swimming class last week at the Farmington Area YMCA.

"I could do everything a little bit, but nothing well," Zarish said. "I've wanted to (take classes) for a long time. I decided to go for it."

Zarish, who is 32, was forced to take swimming lessons as a youngster. She had a bad teacher, and those memories made swimming difficult for her later on.

"I got more afraid of the water through that experience. I used to panic when she started yelling."

MARY JANE Harvey, Zarish's teacher at the Farmington Area YMCA, does a much better job. "She's always positive and supportive, and that made the whole difference for me."

Garlick, 30, didn't learn to swim as a child. She moved to Michigan from England several years ago.

"I couldn't swim before I came here," she said. "I just never got around to it."

"I always wanted to be able to swim, and it's been a very good experience," Garlick said of the class. "I'm very happy with it."

Zarish used to run for exercise, but began to have trouble with her knees. Swimming is a better form of exercise for her, she has found, because it doesn't put pressure on her knees.

Neither of the women had too much trouble with fear of the water, although Zarish did have some fears to face.

"My mother is horrified of water," she said. "I think part of that got passed on to us kids."

SOME ADULTS do have considerable fears to overcome when they take to the water.

"Many of them do still have the fear of water they developed as a child," said Harvey, the YMCA instructor.

"The adults have all the years of fears and inhibitions that the kids don't have," said Bill King, aquatics supervisor. "Definitely, it's better if they learn when they're young, because they don't have so much to overcome."

Some adults have learned bad swimming habits; some are able to swim, but are reluctant to put their faces in the water.

"They never learned the proper way to swim in with your head down," Harvey said.

A variety of reasons keep some youngsters from learning to swim. Some grow up in areas without access to pools or lakes; others have had bad experiences in swimming classes as youngsters.

"Sometimes it's because their parents don't think it's important," Harvey said.

"I think nowadays more people feel that's important. Many parents realize that's important for the child to learn how to swim."

Preschool swimming classes at the Farmington Area YMCA are available for children as young as 6 months.

"THEY STILL have a natural swimming ability," Harvey said of the young swimmers. Children are required to have a parent with them in the class until they reach age 3.

The YMCA also has adult classes for beginners, advanced beginners, intermediate and advanced swimmers.

"We get all different ages, 18 up past retirement age," King said. Some have wanted to learn to swim for years, but have never found the time.

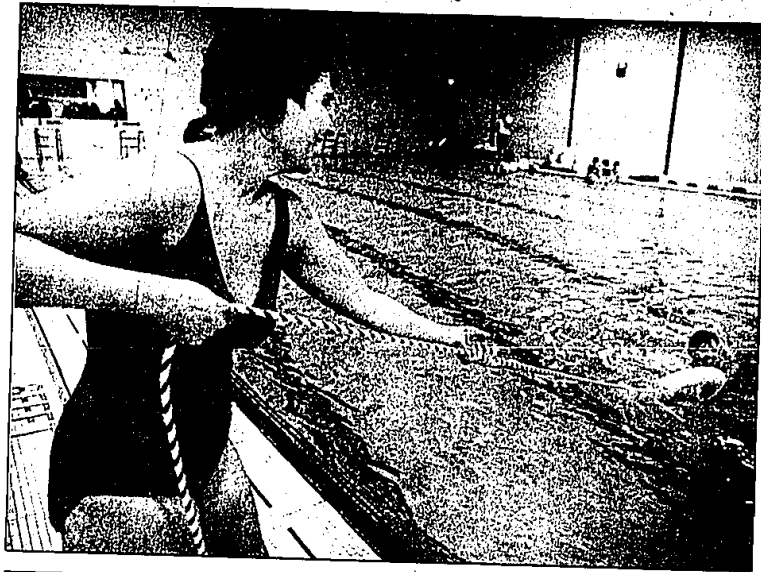
"Maybe they're not working any longer, or their work times have changed," King said of the adults who enroll in the classes.

King and Harvey agree that it's a good idea to learn how to swim.

"I think it's important," King said. "At least it's important to be safe around the water. Just being comfortable and being able to propel yourself through the water, that's probably the main thing."

Many recreational activities, such as canoeing and sailing, take place on or near water. For safety reasons, swimming skills can come in handy.

"It's a way of enjoying life more," Harvey said. (For additional information on the YMCA swimming classes, call 553-4020).



RANDY BORST/staff photographer



Debbie Zarish practices water safety skills, tossing a life preserver to fellow student Eileen Garlick, above. The two take a brief breather at the pool's side, left. Zarish and Garlick finished an advanced beginner swimming class last week at the Farmington Area YMCA. Mary Jane Harvey, the class instructor, said some adult students have difficulty in learning to swim; their fear of the water makes learning to swim a challenge. "Many of them do still have the fear of water they developed as a child," she said.



Mary Jane Harvey (right), a YMCA swimming instructor, works with student Eileen Garlick.



Instructor Mary Jane Harvey (left) and students Eileen Garlick and Debbie Zarish take to the water at the Farmington Area YMCA.



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