

Grandmother's in the swim for SCAMP

BY MARGARET O'BRIEN
STAFF WRITER
When she talks about the mile she swims every day followed by a half hour of intensive water walking and 20 more minutes of exercise, Helen Smith does not sound like your average 72-year-old.

And she isn't.
The long-time Farmington Hills resident keeps young and healthy with exercise and then channels that energy into her volunteer work. "Sitting around playing cards or spending all day shopping just isn't my cup of tea," Smith said. "Keeping busy makes me feel good."

Smith's latest project is the SCAMP swim-a-thon she is organizing from 8 a.m. to noon Wednesday at the Orchard Valley swim club in West Bloomfield. "SCAMP," a six-week summer program for special children with physical, emotional or mental impairments run by the Bloomfield Hills School District at West Hills Middle School, is one of Smith's pet projects.
"To go there and see those kids is a very emotional experience. Some of them are from the inner city and have never seen green grass like that before," she said. "It's rewarding to give them a chance to enjoy their summers, too."

15 years with SCAMP
Smith said that although she

has a grown daughter with special needs who lives in Connecticut, that is not the only reason she has been involved with SCAMP for more than 16 years.

"It gives me an inner peace to know I'm helping children when someone out in Connecticut is helping my daughter," she said.
Another Orchard Valley member selected SCAMP as a swim club project years ago and tapped Smith to take over when he moved away.

"She's really good about getting the swim team involved and she raises quite a bit of money," swim club manager Mark Holdridge said. "She keeps everyone on their toes around here, but is also generous about helping when there is anything that needs to be done."

"And she's always the first person there the minute we open the pool," Holdridge joked. "Even when it's cold we can count on her being here," he said.

Fund raising down
Even though fund raising is down to about a \$1,000 from its level of \$2,500 a few years ago, Smith said she is not discouraged.

"Our goal is always to raise as much as we can and whatever we raise is better than zero," she said.

Although the event isn't until Wednesday, Smith already swam her laps and raised about \$200 —



DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A mile a day: At 72, Helen Smith not only swims a mile a day, as she has for years, but swims in benefits to raise money. Her current organization to benefit is SCAMP, and a swim-a-thon will be held Wednesday to raise money.

not bad for a woman who, in her youth, was afraid to go in the water.

"Oh, I used to be just terrified. I wouldn't even get my face wet until I took lessons," said Smith, who has been a member of the Orchard Valley swim club for 39 years now.

"And I'm glad it did it. It got me out of a back brace," she said referring to a fall that severely injured her back a few years ago.

Another person who is glad

Smith got over her fear of water is SCAMP coordinator Jean Walker, who said she is thankful for people like Smith who are dedicated supporters year after year.

"It's wonderful. She is a great volunteer and she just loves SCAMP," Walker said, adding that one child can go to camp for every \$500 groups like Smith's can raise.

Another of Smith's loves is the volunteer work she has done for 30 years with the Niden Park Braille Transcribers. She was

first certified to translate books and stories into braille for blind library patrons in 1961 and has been doing it ever since.

"It's good to feel like you always have something you can contribute," she said about her braille work and time she has spent with other community organizations and committees.

She said her work is her way of giving back to the community she and her husband Irv have watched grow up since they moved to Farmington Hills 39

years ago. The couple, who have two grown children and four grandchildren, will soon celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary — even though Irv Smith does not share his wife's love for swimming.

"People at the club think I'm divorced because they never see him with me," she joked. "But I think we'll make it to 60 anyway."

If you'd like to make a pledge for Wednesday's swim-a-thon, call the swim club at 851-2656.

County commissioner wants probe of prosecutor

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

An influential Democratic county commissioner is calling for an independent probe of prosecutor Richard Thompson in light of allegations of "political corruption" by a former confidant and renewed complaints about inflexible policies that clog the courts.

"I don't think there's enough information to demand his (Thompson's) resignation," Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, said Friday. But when a former assistant prosecutor alleges political corruption and a circuit judge says the courts are clogged with petty cases while murder trials are put on hold, "something's wrong."

"We should have an outside agency, the state police or the attorney general, take a thorough look at the prosecutor's office."

His call for an independent probe of the prosecutor's office represents an escalation on the part of Pernick, chairman of the county board's Democratic caucus and the highest ranking Democrat in county government.

Pernick has been critical of Thompson, a Republican, before. But he generally stopped short of urging an outside investigation. Pernick said the change is warranted in light of allegations by

former assistant prosecutor James Marcinkowski and renewed criticism from Circuit Court Judge Hilda Gage.

Marcinkowski dropped a bombshell Wednesday when he told commissioners on the personnel committee that Thompson's office is rife with "political corruption."

"This is political corruption of the worst magnitude," Marcinkowski said. "It is not only what Richard Thompson is lauded for fighting, but also what he is most guilty of."

He urged commissioners to look into the prosecutor's office because of a variety of problems, including botched investigations and intimidating, heavy-handed tactics by "storm trooper" investigators working at Thompson's behest.

Marcinkowski, who went door-to-door during Thompson's re-election campaign last fall, said he was victimized by investigators on June 25 when he refused to submit to a tape-recorded interview about another assistant prosecutor's link to a gambling raid in West Bloomfield.

Marcinkowski said he had already undergone extensive questioning concerning former assistant prosecutor Paul Rinaldi, who resigned on June 20. But he

refused to undergo another interview being tape-recorded because, he said, it was demeaning and unnecessary.

Marcinkowski said he was fired. Thompson insisted he resigned.

Either way, Thompson said, the comments of Marcinkowski, who joined the prosecutor's office in February, 1989, after working with the FBI and CIA, were the rantings of a disgruntled ex-employee.

Judge Gage resurrected the complaint about Thompson's policies in response to reporters' questions Thursday.

"I have nothing against Mr. Thompson personally," said Gage.

Judges complain that minor cases are wasting time and resources," the judge said. "But Mr. Thompson is honest. That's what he told voters he would do ... and he's keeping his promise."

Other circuit judges have voiced similar complaints in the past and publicly feuded with Thompson about them. But no other judges were repeating the criticism as of Friday ... at least not publicly.

In the meantime, county commissioners — who have little, if any direct control over the prosecutor — say they are concerned

about corruption until after he left. I don't give his comments much weight."

Crake was more responsive to Judge Gage's comments. Her criticism isn't new, he said. Several judges have publicly criticized what they consider to be Thompson's lack of flexibility.

"But remember, Thompson is an elected official, and he answers to the voters," Crake said. "We (commissioners) don't have any

direct control over the prosecutor. Furthermore, as far as I'm concerned, he's doing exactly what the people of Oakland County want him to do."

Commissioner Marilyn E. Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, agreed. "I didn't see any specific (from Marcinkowski) to warrant an investigation. But I would like to talk with Mr. Thompson."

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