



Honoring Toni St. Pierre

The YWCA of Minneapolis Women's Triathlon is honoring Toni St. Pierre, an inspirational member of the YWCA of Minneapolis community and annual competitor in the YWCA Women's Triathlon, by renaming one of the event's special awards. Toni passed away in February 2013 from cancer at the age of 58. Starting this year, the most improved triathlete will be presented as the Toni St. Pierre Memorial Award. This year's awards ceremony will also highlight two of the participants who are racing in Toni's honor: Toni's daughters, Jessica and Alicia. Due to her quiet, caring, and humble demeanor, many in our community did not know the pivotal role Toni played nationally and historically in women's sports.

Toni was a member of the YWCA of Minneapolis since the Midtown YWCA opened in 2000. She was a long-time member of the fitness facility, and a regular in the pool and at many endurance sports activities, especially the YWCA Indoor Triathlons. It was not uncommon for Toni to be turning in some of the fastest Indoor Triathlon times, for men and women.

In 2008, the inaugural year of the YWCA Women's Triathlon, Toni competed in her first outdoor triathlon at the age of 54. In that first attempt, she placed 23rd overall (out of approximately 500 competitors) and was 2nd in her age group. Paul Johnson, the YWCA Women's Triathlon's founding Race Director, remembers Toni fondly, "I first met Toni as a keenly observant triathlon student at a YWCA workshop. A couple years later, I watched her dominate her age group at the Women's Tri. What an inspiration! Though what remains most clearly to me are her quiet yet bright eyes and smile."

In 2009 and 2010, Toni won her age group at the Women's Tri and competed at an elite level in many more local and national triathlons. She qualified for and competed in Age Group Nationals in 2009 and 2010. In 2011, sidelined by a running injury, Toni teamed up with her daughter, Jessica, to win the relay competition.

Toni was diagnosed with cancer in the summer of 2012. That summer, a triathlon mentee, Heather Dierson brought Toni to the Women's Tri to volunteer. Toni did not have the strength to compete. Dierson reported that as they left the race that day, Toni stated she was sad that this was probably going to be her last time at her favorite tri. Dierson will also be racing the YWCA Women's Triathlon in Toni's honor.

Toni's athletic prowess and impact extends much further back in history than 2000. Toni was in middle and high school pre-Title IX so the opportunity to compete on a girls' teams was very limited. Hopkins Eisenhower High School, where Toni attended, did not have a girls' cross country or cross country ski team. Toni wanted to compete with the boys but was not allowed by the Minnesota State High School League. Toni and her family convinced the ACLU to take up their case against the state. The case went to trial in the spring of 1972 and the ruling was in Toni's favor. The ruling gained national attention, helped make a national case for greater equity in athletic opportunities for girls, and came a few months ahead of the Title IX federal legislation. The following year in school, Toni joined the boys' cross-country, track and cross country ski teams. That year, she was state champion in the mile and the half-mile, setting a national half-mile record of 2:18.3.

In 2006, Hopkins High (Eisenhower closed in the 1980s) inducted her into the school's Athletic Hall of Fame. On February 6, 2013, Toni was set to accept a Special Merit Award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day. The Special Merit Award recognizes individuals who exemplify the highest levels of commitment to breaking barriers for girls and women in sport. Toni passed away on February 2 and her family accepted the award on her behalf.



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Honoring Toni St. Pierre

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Truly the trailblazer in women's athletics, Toni St. Pierre continues to inspire generations of women athletes in Minnesota. The YWCA of Minneapolis Women's Triathlon will annually recognize Toni for her impact on the community and women's sport through the Toni St. Pierre Memorial Award for the Most Improved Triathletes.

Please read more about Toni:

Star Tribune obituary: <http://www.startribune.com/local/west/191555011.html>

Girls and Women in Sports Press Release: http://www.ngwsd-mn.com/NGWSD_Press_Release_2013.pdf

Run Minnesota Article (p. 18) : http://issuu.com/runmdra/docs/runmn_jan_feb_2010