

FLORIDA SENIOR GAMES

Swimmer Has Spent a Lifetime Diving Into Many Different Waters

Nick Gandy

To celebrate his 90th birthday, on October 9, Gordon Ralph was treated to a dinner featuring a menu of Italian delicacies with recipes from a cookbook he helped publish.

In a little less than two months, Ralph will swim in the 2021 Florida Senior Games, for the first time, in the 90-94 age group.

A swimmer in his teenage and college years, Ralph, like many senior athletes, “took about 50 years off,” to spend his working life in a variety of areas.

After graduating with a law degree from the University of Chicago in 1954, Ralph spent time working as a lawyer, a financial planner, a developer of educational tools for American Airlines pilots, and as a publisher.

Now in his ninth decade of living, Gordon Ralph has lived an incredibly full life and continues to do so.



"Yes, he's done some very interesting things," said his wife, Jacquie.

Besides spending time at one of the many swimming pools in his retirement hometown of The Villages, he can also be found on one of the many golf courses in the Central Florida community.

Ralph is competing in six events at the 2021 Florida Senior Games in December. The Games, presented by Humana, are slated to be held in the Greater Fort Lauderdale area. He will swim in two distance events—the 200-yard backstroke and 200-yard breaststroke. With a qualifying performance at the 2021 Games, he hopes to represent Florida in the 2022 National Senior Games, which will also be held in the Greater Fort Lauderdale area.

Once he touches the finish line in both of those events, he will become the 90-94 age-group record holder as the first to complete the race. He will also join a club of three other 90+ age-group record holders in the 30-year history of the Florida Senior Games.

He proudly claims that he's still a record-holder at the University of Chicago, even though his last dive off the starting block as a college swimmer was nearly 70 years ago.

"I set the record for the Bartlett Pool Facility in the 150-yard backstroke," Ralph proclaimed. "After I graduated, the building was demolished and later renovated to become a dining hall. So my record is intact."

Much like the differences in the two strokes he swims in the Florida Senior Games, the path to his 90th birthday has seen quite a few contrasts.

After completing his law degree from the University of Chicago, Ralph was drafted into the U.S. Army and served as a JAG Officer, where, as a First Lieutenant, he tried over 150 court martial cases at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.



He spent 30 years as a financial planner for Northwest Mutual, both in the home office in Chicago and in the field, where he worked with local agents to create specialized forms of life insurance and executive benefits.

In the 1980s, he "dreamed up" and was part of a team that developed a teaching desk for American Airlines pilots to use in their training before allowing them into the cockpit.

He and his wife of 26 years, Jacquie, moved to The Villages in 2005. Since that time he has collaborated with authors to publish more than 30 books.

"I take care of all of the mechanical parts," he said. "I do the proofing and marketing after

Continued on page 10

Florida Senior Games Swimmer... continued from page 9

it's published. It's quite a change of pace from previous years in my career."

One of his most recently published books explored the topic of diversity and inclusion in the workplace that featured interviews with members of a cruise-ship staff.

"There were people of 70+ nationalities working on this cruise ship," he said. "What an excellent place to learn more about respecting your co-workers."

His Florida Senior Games accolades began rolling in at the 2006 Games in Lee County, when he won four gold medals in the 75-79 age group.

Since his debut in 2006, Ralph has competed in 11 Florida Senior Games, winning over 50 medals. He was also a gold medalist at the 2007 National Senior Games in the 50-yard backstroke.

As he advances into higher age groups, his competition decreases. But at this point of his life in the lanes, it's all about keeping it up.

"I try to attend the Florida Senior Games every year and usually enter three distances of backstroke and three distances of breaststroke," Ralph said. "That way the shorter distances (50 and 100 yards) keep my arms moving faster, and the longer distances (200 yards) are all about endurance. I do my best to keep my times as low as possible."

Over the years, Ralph admits his three days per week training time with The Villages Aquatic Swim Team has decreased from an hour or an hour and a half to 30 or 40 minutes. However, his efforts do not go unnoticed by coaches and teammates.

"We are very lucky to have older swimmers like Gordon, and a couple of others, in their 90s



on our team," said Villages Aquatic Swim Team Coach Bob Jennings. "It's wonderful to be doing what he's doing at that age and is still able to keep it up."

The story of Gordon Ralph's life has a lot of subtitles. He claims it all comes under the heading of what lawyers try to do on an everyday basis: "pleasing people and solving problems."

"I enjoy making the world a better place and leaving it better than when I joined it," he said.