



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CHICAGO RIVER SWIM TO MAKE HISTORY AS FIRST OPEN WATER EVENT IN NEARLY 100 YEARS
Event Will Celebrate the Rebirth of the Chicago River and Raise Money for ALS

WHAT: Chicago River Swim will feature 500 qualified swimmers in the Chicago River
WHERE: Begins at Dearborn Street Bridge | Finish Festival at Clark Street Bridge
WHEN: September 22, 2024 | Swim begins at 6:45 AM | Finish Festival at 8:00 AM
REGISTRATION: ChicagoRiverSwim.org

CHICAGO, IL – Get ready to witness history as the inaugural Chicago River Swim breaks a nearly century-old tradition, marking a revival of open water swimming events in the heart of downtown Chicago. Scheduled for September 22, 2024, this remarkable occasion will not only celebrate the river's renaissance but will also serve as a fundraiser for ALS research.

Five hundred qualified applicants will traverse the Chicago River amidst its famed skyscrapers and beneath its iconic bridges, in what promises to be an event akin to urban waterway reclamation efforts seen in Amsterdam, London, Paris, and New York City. Meticulous planning will ensure a safe and successful swim experience for all participants.

"The changes in the Chicago River over the past decades are nothing short of incredible," remarked Doug McConnell, a proud Chicago native, world-renowned Triple Crown Swimmer, and CEO/co-founder of the nonprofit A Long Swim, the driving force behind this event. "What was once unimaginable is now possible. We are committed to conducting a safe event, backed by the latest in water quality technology and a thorough safety plan."

The Chicago River Swim will monitor water quality constantly up to the morning of the swim. To determine the water quality, they will aim to leverage data from experts working in the Chicago region, including the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) and H2NOW, which is a real-time, seasonal water quality monitoring system administered by Current, a prominent Chicago-based nonprofit. According to the MWRD, water quality has improved dramatically in the Chicago River, coming a long way since the early 20th century when hundreds of sewers and other polluters emptied directly into it. The MWRD collects extensive water quality data on Chicago area waterways through their ambient water quality monitoring program where the monthly results can be compared to the State of Illinois water quality standards. The MWRD also partners with Argonne National Laboratory to analyze microorganisms in the river. Chicago River Swim will use this combined data to determine if the water meets regulatory standards for human contact.

McConnell's organization has extensive experience hosting open water swims and has benchmarked its safety plan against other events around the world. Only qualified swimmers will be allowed to participate. A Long Swim is also collaborating with federal, state, and local authorities to ensure water

safety for swimmers. The comprehensive safety plan will include over 100 safety personnel, including lifeguards, spotters, kayakers, and emergency responders.

During the event, the Chicago River will be closed to all commercial and recreational vessel traffic. Only authorized swimmers, equipped with distinctive swim caps, RFID timing chips, and inflatable swim buoys, will be allowed to participate after meeting eligibility criteria, including training and fundraising goals.

The Chicago River Swim is also working closely with other esteemed organizations including the Chicago Harbor Safety Committee, which will communicate with the waterway community about this event, and Friends of the Chicago River, a nonprofit focused on the health of the Chicago River.

“Since 1979, Friends of the Chicago River has been working to improve the health of the Chicago River system for the benefit of people and wildlife and by doing so, we have laid the foundation for the river to be a beautiful, continuous, easily accessible corridor of open space in the Chicago region,” says Margaret Frisbie, Friends’ executive director. “This monumental open water swim event is emblematic of all the work so many good people have put into transforming this wonderful waterway.”

A Long Swim, born from personal tragedy after McConnell’s father and sister succumbed to ALS, utilizes open water and marathon-distance swimming events to raise funds for collaborative ALS research at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine. Proceeds from the Chicago River Swim will also support local learn-to-swim programs for at-risk youth.

The Chicago River Swim will take place on Sunday, Sept. 22, 2024, beginning at 6:45 AM. The swim course will be set within the main stem of the river. Swimmers will start between the Clark and Dearborn Street bridges and navigate a looped course between State Street on the east to Wolf Point on the west. Spectators are encouraged to be part of the historic event with a family-friendly Finish Festival near the Clark Street Bridge.

ABOUT A LONG SWIM

In 2011, siblings Doug McConnell and Ellen McConnell Blakeman established A Long Swim, a nonprofit dedicated to raising funds for collaborative ALS research. Their motivation stemmed from personal tragedy when their father succumbed to ALS in 2006, followed shortly by Ellen's diagnosis and subsequent passing from the same devastating disease. Swimming emerged as their chosen medium for fundraising, symbolizing a profound contrast to ALS as it engages all muscles, and thus, they aptly named their initiative A Long Swim, utilizing the same ALS acronym.

Since its inception, A Long Swim has raised almost \$2 million for collaborative ALS research at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University. The funds provided by A Long Swim also helped the Ozdinler Lab. In collaboration with Dr. Silverman, the team identified AKV-9, a new compound that improves diseased brain neurons in ALS. AKV-9 has been granted orphan drug status and received FDA approval to start Phase 1 clinical trials.

For more information visit ALongSwim.org.

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