



**POST EVENT RELEASE:**

SEPTEMBER 22, 2024

**INAUGURAL CHICAGO RIVER SWIM MAKES A SPLASH AT OHIO STREET BEACH**

***Event Raised \$200k for ALS Research and Swimming Lessons for Children in Underserved Communities***

**CHICAGO** – The inaugural Chicago River Swim, held on Sunday, September 22, 2024, at Ohio Street Beach, was an overwhelming success. Although the event had to be relocated from the Chicago River to Lake Michigan due to logistical challenges, it still drew remarkable support. Despite the change in venue, the event stayed true to its mission of supporting ALS research and providing water safety education for underserved communities. Organizers remain optimistic about the future and are hopeful that next year's swim will take place in the Chicago River, making it a historic event that celebrates athleticism and shines a spotlight on the ongoing efforts to restore and revitalize the Chicago River.

"Though we had to shift the venue this year, the spirit of the Chicago River Swim remains intact," said Doug McConnell, founder of A Long Swim and the nonprofit event's organizer. "The energy was incredible, and this is just the beginning. We raised an impressive \$200,000 for ALS research and water safety education, and next year, we hope to swim in the river and bring this event even closer to Chicago's heart."

At the ceremony, McConnell, alongside Congressman Mike Quigley, presented two major donations:

- **\$150,000** to Dr. Hande Ozdinler of Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine to support the Ellen McConnell Blakeman ALS Research Fellowship.
- **\$50,000** to Lt. Shanell Debela at the Salvation Army Ray & Joan Kroc Corps Community Center for providing swim lessons to 2,000 children in underserved communities.

Congressman Mike Quigley, a longtime advocate for environmental protection and ALS research, attended the event to show his support. As the representative of Illinois' 5th Congressional District, Quigley has been a dedicated advocate for environmental protection, especially in improving the Chicago River's water quality and ecosystem restoration. He's also been a steadfast supporter of ALS research and advocacy.

**Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson** was unable to attend, however, he sent his congratulations to the Chicago River Swim on this momentous occasion.

The event was officially recognized by Cook County Board **President Toni Preckwinkle**, who issued a proclamation declaring September 22, 2024, as **Inaugural Chicago River Swim Day**. In her statement, Preckwinkle noted, "THEREFORE, I, Toni Preckwinkle, President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, do hereby proclaim September 22, 2024, as Inaugural Chicago River Swim Day in Cook County, and I urge all residents to celebrate the athleticism, philanthropy, and environmental awareness exemplified by this extraordinary event."

**Governor J.B. Pritzker** also acknowledged the significance of A Long Swim's contributions in his special remarks: "For the past thirteen years, A Long Swim has been raising awareness of ALS as well as nearly \$2 million for its research. In addition, their inaugural Chicago River Swim will raise funds for childhood water safety education in Chicago while also celebrating the city's commitment to environmental improvement and the restoration of the Chicago River as a recreational space. Illinois is proud to have enjoyed your service to our state. As you reflect on your accomplishments, I urge you to make plans for the future of your association that will build on your past successes. I am grateful for all the ways your organization has supported a strong future for Illinois."

This year's participants and fundraisers included elite athletes, a former Olympian, and triathletes from across the country. Today's Fastest Swimmers were:

#### 1-Mile Swim

- Female Winner: Daphne Menezes (Huntertown, IN) – 24:55
- Male Winner: Damon Lucenta (Geneva, IL) – 24:48

#### 2-Mile Swim

- Female Winner: Becca Mann (West Hollywood, CA) – 44:08
- Male Winner: Greg Tracy (Madison, WI) – 45:23

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### **ABOUT THE CHICAGO RIVER SWIM**

The Chicago River Swim (CRS) is a charitable event created by A Long Swim, a nonprofit dedicated to raising funds for ALS research through open water and marathon swimming events. Inspired by successful urban swims in cities like New York, Amsterdam, and Paris, CRS aims to change perceptions of the Chicago River. Although this year's swim will take place in Lake Michigan, the event serves as a pilot with the goal of returning to the river next year for a historic swim through the heart of the city.

### **ABOUT A LONG SWIM**

A Long Swim is a nonprofit that designs and manages open water swimming events to raise funds for ALS research. Founded by siblings Doug McConnell and Ellen McConnell Blakeman after their father passed away from ALS, and Ellen was later diagnosed with the disease, the organization has raised nearly \$2 million for ALS research at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. Doug, a world-class marathon swimmer, has conquered some of the most challenging waters in the world, including the English Channel, Manhattan Island, and the Molokai Channel, using his skills to fundraise for the fight against ALS.