

DOLPHINS OF THE DESERT SWIMMING ACADEMY AND TUCSON'S IMAGO DEI MIDDLE SCHOOL ANNOUNCE LEARN-TO-SWIM PROGRAM FOR ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN JANUARY 2008.

A new program will allow the students at Imago Dei the chance to learn the basic skills in water safety free of charge.

The idea for the program began with DDSA co-founder Geoff Glaser, who previously had provided free swimming lessons to needy children in San Francisco. When he started Dolphins of the Desert Swimming Academy in January 2007, Geoff knew he wanted to bring a similar learn-to-swim program to Tucson.

"More than anything, I felt a deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude in helping those who might never get this life-saving training unless someone stepped forward to help," Glaser said.

Basic skills include holding their breath underwater, being able to blow bubbles and tread water. Students who graduate past this first level of competence will be able to learn one or two of the four competitive strokes. It is likely that swimmers with national team or Olympic experience will assist in teaching level two classes.

An Episcopal priest, Glaser's work with the learn-to-swim program was part of his outreach work in the San Francisco community, and he said the rewards from seeing these kids swim were more than he expected.

Through his connections with the Episcopal Church, Glaser was able to meet with Imago Dei co-founders Susan Anderson-Smith and Anne Sawyer, who also serve in the church's ministry. The three were immediately able to see the need in the Imago Dei students and were committed to set up the program.

The lessons will be taught primarily at the downtown YMCA in Tucson. Students will be provided swimsuits, goggles and caps. All costs are underwritten thanks to the generosity of the St. Agnes Spiritual Life Center in San Francisco (a Jesuit ministry) and St. Francis in the Valley Episcopal Church in Green Valley.

Imago Dei Middle School is an independent Episcopal school in Tucson that offers small class sizes and an 11-month school year to its students, with a free or reduced lunch program. It opened in 2005.