

Swimming Anyone?

Geneva and Jim Parks compete in first NVSO.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
THE GAZETTE

Jim Park's bare feet leave wet footprints on the concrete at Mount Vernon RECenter swimming pool. He heads for the first open lane and slips into the water. Jim is there on his lunch hour to meet his wife Geneva so they can practice for the upcoming Northern Virginia Senior Olympics (NVSO) events.

"Jim is the swimmer," Geneva Park says. "I'm more of a tennis player."

Today Jim Park will swim 20-30 laps, practicing the breaststroke and freestyle, his two best events, while Geneva Park will do about 10 laps mixing it up with backstroke and freestyle.

"Jim never takes a break; he doesn't get tired. He set a record," Geneva Park interjects.

"That was when I was eight years old," Jim Park says, "and two years later someone else beat the record and his name went up on the wall. I couldn't figure out where my name went."

Jim Park says he grew up swimming. He was on the Northern Virginia Swim Team. "I grew up around here, near Springfield Mall." He will compete in the 50-yard breaststroke and the 100-yard freestyle.

Geneva Park says she will participate in the backstroke "but I'm not really a swimmer." She says their children really motivated them to get more active. "Colette is our star swimmer. We try to keep up with her."

Geneva Park says, "We realized we are getting older. It was a joint decision to look after our health and we enjoy it." She adds that her father just died at 95-years-old and she realized that people who move have a better quality of life.

Geneva Park says besides swimming she will enter the tennis singles competition. She has been playing tennis since she was



PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE GAZETTE

Geneva Park gets ready for NVSO swimming events although she says her real sport is tennis.

7-years-old on the court with her mother who played into her 70s. Geneva played tennis on the high school tennis team and then with the Mount Vernon Racquet Club. "We're also going to do the walk, and I'm going to do the shot put. I've never done it before but it's only \$2 for each event you enter."

Jim Park will enter the 60-meter dash and the 400-meter walk.

"I'm doing those, too," Geneva Park adds.

Jim Park adds, "Don't forget we're doing the standing long jump."

"I am?" Geneva Park replies.

The Parks have been preparing for their events by swimming regularly, mostly in the summer, and walking in their Alexandria neighborhood all year long. "It is very hilly," Geneva Park says. They walk for about 45 minutes every day pushing one of their daughters in her 70-pound medical stroller.



Jim and Geneva Park choose adjoining lanes to practice laps with the NVSO swimming competition just over a week away. This event is being held at the Dulles South Multipurpose Center.



Colette Park, who her mother calls "the real swimmer," adjusts her mother's hair before a noontime swimming practice on Tuesday.



Jim Park practices breaststroke at Mount Vernon RECenter on Belle View Boulevard in preparation for the Northern Virginia Senior Olympics.

"It's a big motivator. She really likes to be outside."

Do they hope to win a ribbon in their first NVSO competition? "We hope so but we don't know the competition," Jim Parksays. "If we do, we do; if we don't, we don't."

"And we may be a little rusty," Geneva Park adds.

Jim Park says, "I remember my dad coming home from the Senior Olympics with

two medals on his chest. It always stayed with me. He had a big smile; he was so proud."

NVSO begins Sept. 15 with the opening ceremony at Thomas Jefferson Community Center followed by track, rowing and diving events and ends Sept. 26. Events are held all over the Northern Virginia area at 29 schools, senior centers, parks and retirement communities.