

Ted and Thelma Roach

Ted Roach is a pioneer and an icon in Masters Swimming. Noted as an outstanding marathon swimmer and founder of the Alderwood Teddy Bares, Ted's zest for living a healthy lifestyle with a side of fun will forever mark him as a role model in the swimming world.

In 1976 the Roach Family: Ted, his wife Thelma, and their four children Michele, Ted Jr, Jo-Anne, and Debbie, were the first and only family relay to conquer Lake Ontario. The swim was done for the *York Lung Association Charity*. After 22 hours and 43 minutes, the Roach Family swam together, through the Ontario Place marine channel, to the sound of cheers. Later that year the family competed in a relay in Hawaii in a shark-filled ocean. "At least we didn't get eaten up by sharks." Ted quipped. And just a year earlier, Ted had coached and piloted his daughter Debbie on her successful 18 hour and 41 minute swim of Lake Ontario.



Roach Family 1976

In 1995, at age 70, Ted tried a solo crossing of Lake Ontario to become the oldest male to make the attempt. Leaving Niagara-on-the-Lake on August 13th, he had covered 12 miles in 7 hours before eventually giving in to the cold water and cramps¹.

Ted was a Director of *Solo Swims of Ontario* for many years and a Swim Master for more than half a dozen swims. He still sits on their advisory board. *SSO* was formed in 1975 as the provincial governing body long distance solo swims following a fatal accident during an attempt to swim Lake Ontario.

In 1973 Ted started his own Masters team at the Alderwood Pool in south Etobicoke. Most of the original members of the team were parents of swimmers in the age group club at that pool. The team name, the *Teddy Bares*, was chosen to honour its founder, Ted; to reflect the team mascot, a giant teddy bear; and to recognize the state of dress of the participants.

¹ Source: Solo Swims of Ontario <http://soloswims.com/>

The fledgling *Teddy Bares* hosted their first swim meet in January 1975 and it has become the longest running meet in the country. While the SCY meets were once more common, Alderwood is now the only sanctioned SCY meet in Canada, and the only opportunity for swimmers to set yard records in their home country. The *Teddy Bares* have earned their fair share of both [individual and relay records](#), particular in the more-senior age groups.



*Ted Roach, coach and swimmer,
1975 Alderwood meet*

The yard format is still very popular in the USA and the 2018 USMS Spring Nationals attracted more than 2,900 swimmers with more than a few Canadians among them.

In the 1970s, Ted was instrumental in re-establishing the OWS swim competitions at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE). The CNE has a significant swim program in the 1960s but it had fizzled out. The solo swims were 5 miles each and the 5 person relays covered a total of 12 miles. Ted and Thelma were on more than a few winning relays.

Ted made significant contributions to building Masters swimming both in Ontario and nationally. He organized the first [Ontario Master's Swimming Championship in 1976](#) at Alderwood. In 1975, Canadian Masters announced that they would host a world championship in 1978. The enormous challenge was described by Berne McGrath, former chair of Canadian Masters, in his [1980 article](#) about the development of Masters swimming in Canada. Yet Canadian Masters, Ted and his co-chair Baron Drobig, delivered the first international Masters Aquatic Championship², held in [Etobicoke in 1978](#)³. The multi-disciplinary aspect of the event flowed into the first [World Masters Games](#) which was held in Toronto in 1985.



*1970s Winning the 12 mile CNE Relay
Ted in front with Thelma behind him*

Ted's dedication to the development of masters swimming found its way to the bodies that have governed our sport. Ted served as a Director of the Masters Committee of CASA – Ontario Section for 6 years. Ted then became the Chairman of the National Masters Committee of CASA. During

² The event was necessarily named the 1st Senior Age Division Aquatics Invitational for reasons explained in the 1980 article.

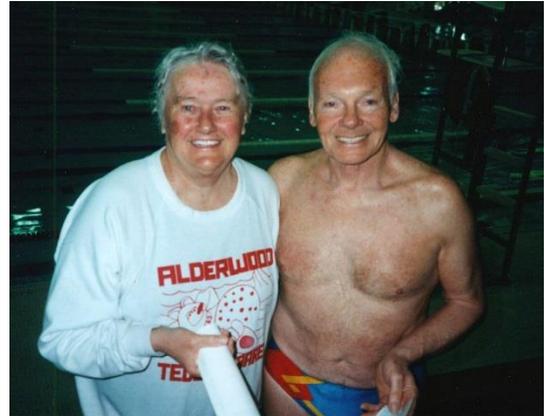
³ Source: Results from USMS archives https://www.usms.org/hist/swimmaster/1978_swimmaster_v7n7_09.pdf

his tenure the first Canadian Masters Swimming Championship was held in Winnipeg in 1981 the full results of which are posted in the MSO Archives⁴.

In 1998, MSO recognized Ted's contributions to building Masters swimming with the [Swims Award](#), also known as the *Order of the Soggy Goggle*.

As swimmers, Ted and his wife Thelma were dominant in the Masters swimming world for many years.

Thelma was an accomplished swimmer and once a member of the famed *Dolphinettes*, an *ornamental swimming team*. As a masters swimmer, she set 58 Canadian LCM and SCM records between 1978 and 1989. And we have not even begun to track down the Ontario records which include SCY. Ted broke 128 Canadian LCM and SCM records, the latest in 2010 at the age of 85. He still holds 9 Ontario records over the three meet formats⁵.



Ted and Thelma Roach

Together Ted and Thelma Roach helped the Teddy Bares capture 22 Canadian LCM and SCM relay records, one of which is still unbroken. And in Ontario, their names still appear on 6 active relay records waiting to be bettered.

You could not ask for more supportive teammates. “Thelma was amazing and a lot of fun. The team would often con her into wanting to race by saying there were chocolate eclairs waiting at the end of the race” remembers a Teddy Bare teammate.

Ted's spirit of inclusion was felt by every single team member. His team spirit was contagious. He always encouraged everyone in the team to compete and especially to swim relays. He used to say, “Once a Teddy Bare always a Teddy Bare.”

⁴ The first declared *National Championship* was 1979 Oakville with only one non-Ontario club. The second Masters Championship was split between the 1980 Western Championship in Winnipeg and the Eastern Championship in Pointe Claire, both LCM. The 1981 Championship in Winnipeg (LCM) was the first to welcome all masters swimmers to a single championship event.

⁵ Source: Christian Berger's Canadian Record History - <http://www.statsman.ca/index28.htm> and MSO Records database <https://ms.mastersswimmingontario.ca/>



Ted Starting the Meet

On January 19, 2020, Alderwood celebrated the 45th Anniversary of its swim meet. Ted was on hand to perform the ceremonial start of the meet, using a real starter's pistol and to cut the anniversary cake with the help of some longtime Teddy Bares.

We are family. Thank you Ted and Thelma Roach for all you have done for Masters Swimming and for being an inspiration to the sport.



Teddy Bares - Linda Berry, Ted Roach, Lee Shimano, Barrie Malloch and Ethel St. Laurent

Acknowledgement

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*Sue Weir and Beth Carey
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