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LOCAL

Cloud Chasers

Some club members attach ties on the tail of their
kites, a fitting tribute to fathers on Sunday.

PAGE B3

The Villages



Alicia Weber, an aquatics instructor at The Villages Wellness Center, is also a professional triathlete. Weber is in training to compete in October in the Orlando International Tri-athletic Union event.

George Horsford / Daily Sun

A determined
ATHLETE

A determined **ATHLETE**

AQUATICS INSTRUCTOR AT THE VILLAGES WELLNESS
CENTER TRAINING TO COMPETE IN TRIATHLON

By **WILMA FLEMING**
DAILY SUN

THE VILLAGES —
Alicia Weber, an energetic
aquatics instructor at The
Villages Wellness Center,
has just turned pro triathlete.

In addition to teaching, Weber is
in training to compete in October in
the Orlando International Tri-athlet-
ic Union event, which will include a
1,500-meter swim, a 25-mile bike
ride and a 6.2-mile run.

It is like a dream come true for a
little girl who, at age 4, broke
through the yellow tape during one
of her father's races saying, "I'm
going to be doing this some day."

For Weber, some day has arrived.
Professor Christiaan
Leeuwenburgh of the University of
Florida feels Weber has the determi-
nation required by the upcoming
competition.

"I think Alicia is a determined

See **WEBER**, B6

AQUATIC CLASSES

Alicia Weber teaches
Aqua Noodle, Joint Sessions
and Aquatic Bridge Therapy
on Monday, Wednesday and
Friday, from noon to 6 p.m.
and on Tuesday and
Thursday from 9 a.m. to 1
p.m. at The Villages Wellness
Center. For information about
her classes, call 753-6910.

WEBER, from B1

athlete, which fits well with the three grueling events she will need to get through for the triathlon and I wish her well," Leeuwenburgh said.

Weber said she had been training nearly all her life for this moment.

"In middle school, I started running in track and field competitions and, basically, I got hooked," she said.

"In the spring I ran track, sprinted in 400 and 800 meters, but continued on my weekly runs. By the time I was 13, I was running on my own and I made a commitment to run every day," she said.

Weber gained many successes over cindered ground, taking a number of medals, and by age 15 she ran a national championship race in San Jose, Calif.

Weber's parents were behind her ambitious goals from the very beginning.

"My parents always supported me," she said. "They took me to all my events, and we'd actually make family vacations out of it."

At age 16, Alicia won a 3,000-meter event and knew at that point she had to focus on her specific goals as a runner.

Later, she became the only female in the National Juniors Championship to run in back-to-back events.

"I finished 10th in the 5,000 meters and fifth in the 10,000 meters. It was exciting because I earned my All-American award there," she said.

Weber, a native of the Pittsburgh suburb of South Park, repeated as a 10,000-meter All American, and her finish in the Pittsburgh Great Road Race with a time of 36:41 in the 10K got her into international competition.

College scouts now paid close attention to her running and she realized she had to make a choice.

"I ended up going to Duquesne. It was close to home and they had programs I was interested in. The problem was, I really wasn't happy there," she said.

At one point in 1999, she sneaked out, flew out on the weekend and qualified for the triathlete nationals in Missouri.

"Under Duquesne's rules, I could only do track and field events.



Alicia Weber teaches a class at The Villages Wellness Center. **George Horsford / Daily Sun**

"I felt they wanted to confine me and I needed to break through from that," Weber said.

"Missouri was a qualifier for the world championship and that was what I wanted, in the worst way. I finished in the top 12 for the 16-20 age group," she said.

After that, things changed. I talked to the coach from the U.S. Olympic Committee and I went to the University of Florida to train," she said.

"I stepped out onto the track and met JJ. Clark. He was the running coach for the University of Florida, and he wanted me to be on that team. I had dreamed of that," Weber said.

At the time Clark's two sisters, Hazel and Joetta, and his wife, Jearl, were all in

Gainesville training for the 2000 Olympic team.

"The Clarks were very well respected, and I had visualized of some day running next to them," she said, smiling.

The Clarks were the first family to qualify for the Olympic running team.

"A movie was made of JJ's father, Joe Clark, called, 'Lean On Me.' I had read about them and always dreamed of running with them," she said.

"I transferred to U of F and ran track and field there, but I also got on the Tri-Gators, a triathletes' college team," Weber said.

"I felt so at home there. I made new friends and got involved as a motivational speaker for the team and for the Triathletes Club."

Weber competed in her first world championship triathlon in Perth, Australia, that same year.

In 2001, Weber was chosen as the USA Junior Olympic Triathlete Camp guest speaker. She graduated in 2002, then competed in the Internationals in Tempe, Ariz., but said, "I wasn't happy with how I finished there. I learned the key is to know your body and how it reacts to the conditions.

"I'm afraid of dehydration and I'm afraid of cramping. Now I cross-train and I've learned to drink enough, at least two bottles, for the 25 miles on the bike," she said.

Weber's next challenge is to increase her swim training in open waters.

"I go to the beaches and I have to learn how to draft better. It's like swimming in a school of fish, you have to save your energy until you come out," she said.

As for her aquatics teaching at The Villages Wellness Center, Alicia loves that, too.

Bessie Pate, one of her students, is pleased with the help Weber has given her.

"I think Alicia is wonderful and she is very athletic. I've had trouble with my leg and she helped me by changing my exercises," Pate said.

Weber enjoys the class, too. "I'm a goal-oriented person and the people here are wonderful," Weber said.

"I really like it when I can help them alleviate their pain or alter the conditions so they can meet their personal goals and feel better," she said.

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