

# “For some kids, it can be monumental.”

RACE DIRECTOR JIM MISHLER, ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN THE KIDS GET ACTIVE TRIATHLON



On Saturday, about 150 children ages 6 to 13 descended on Ramona Park to swim, bike and run hundreds of yards during the Kids Get Active triathlon in Portage. (Ryan Shek/MLive.com)

## PORTAGE

# Hundreds ‘build character’ in Kids Get Active Triathlon

By Ryan Shek  
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Two years after Jim Mishler lost half a lung to spontaneous pneumothorax, he competed in his first triathlon.

“I simply didn’t know what I was capable of doing,” Mishler said, recalling post-surgery weight and physical limitations brought about by his condition. “I just wanted to go out and be alive when I hit the finish line. ... I just wanted to go ahead and see how things went.”

Gradually realizing his own abilities and gaining confidence through various triathlons, Mishler said he wanted to give children the opportunity to do the same and organized the Kids Get Active Triathlon in Portage four years ago.

On Saturday, about 150 children ages six to 13 descended on Ramona Park to swim, bike and run hundreds of yards during the event’s fifth installment.

### ‘THEY DO A LITTLE MORE’

“The more I got into doing it, the more I thought: I can do this a little faster,” said Mishler, the event’s race director. “Kids, especially, don’t have a grasp of what they can truly do until they get an opportunity to stick

a toe in the water and give it a try.

“(The triathlon) gets them realizing (their abilities),” he added. “They start thinking about how they can do a little more — and they do a little more.”

“For some kids, it can be monumental.”

To start the race, the children lined up in the shallows of Long Lake, where they’d swim up to 100 meters and transition into a 1.4 or .7-mile long bike ride depending on age.

After pedaling the park’s parking lots and paved paths, the competitors abandoned their bicycles to run three quarters of a mile, or half a mile, to the finish line.

### ‘A GREAT PROCESS’

There, hundreds of parents stood clapping and cheering on their sons, daughters and grandchildren who fought to finish the course.

“It’s so exciting,” said Doreen Gardner, as she cheered on her grandchildren, ages 6 and 7, who were pedaling their way around the park. “To me, (this triathlon) is building character in our young people, it’s taught them discipline.”

Gardner, whose grandchildren have been preparing for the triath-

lon for six weeks, said she’s admired the personal growth brought about by the event.

“They’ve been dedicated, they’ve been committed, they’ve even been more obedient,” Gardner said, adding her little competitors eat healthier and go to bed when asked “because they’re tired from working so hard.”

“It’s been a great process,” she said. “I don’t care how they finish, I just want them to feel good about themselves.”

“It’s been a fun experience,” added Bobbie Vanzile, of Schoolcraft, whose son, 12, and daughter, 9, raced in the event. “This whole year is about our family getting healthy and active.”

In addition to children and their families, the race also drew more than two dozen volunteers, such as Mary Nielsen, whose son, 16, used to race in the event.

Now, he plays soccer at Loy Norrix High School.

“(I enjoy) seeing their little faces,” Nielsen said, laughing and cheering as she watched the racers’ determined faces. “(The triathlon) exposes them to all these fantastic things there are to do outside and with each other.”