

# Lake Murray

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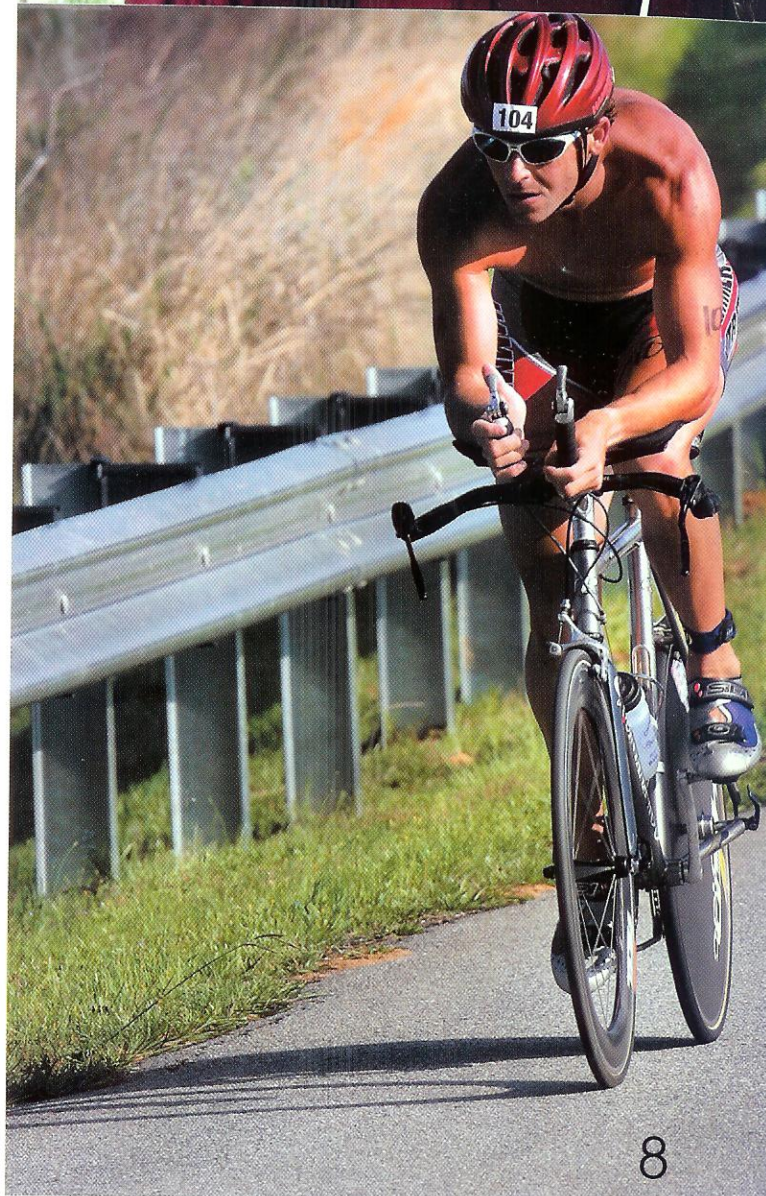
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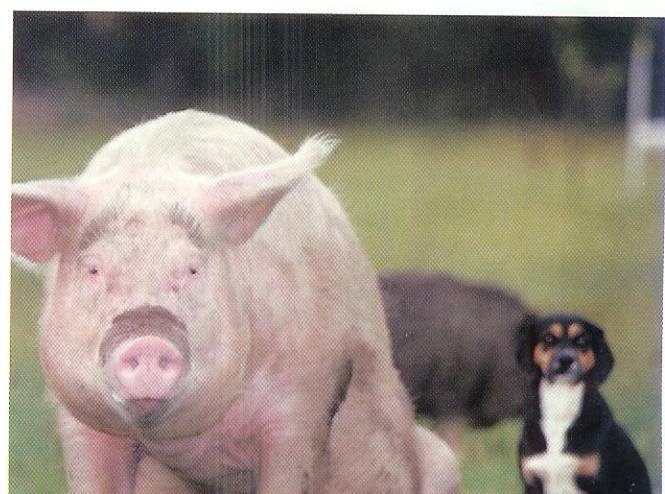
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8





LAKE MURRAY TRIATHLON  
cuts to the chase



It is the start of the fifth annual Lake Murray Triathlon (held Sunday, May 22). The race features a 750-meter swim, a 16-mile bike and a three-mile run. It is the fourth event in the 11-race Palmetto State Triathlon Series, which ends in October.

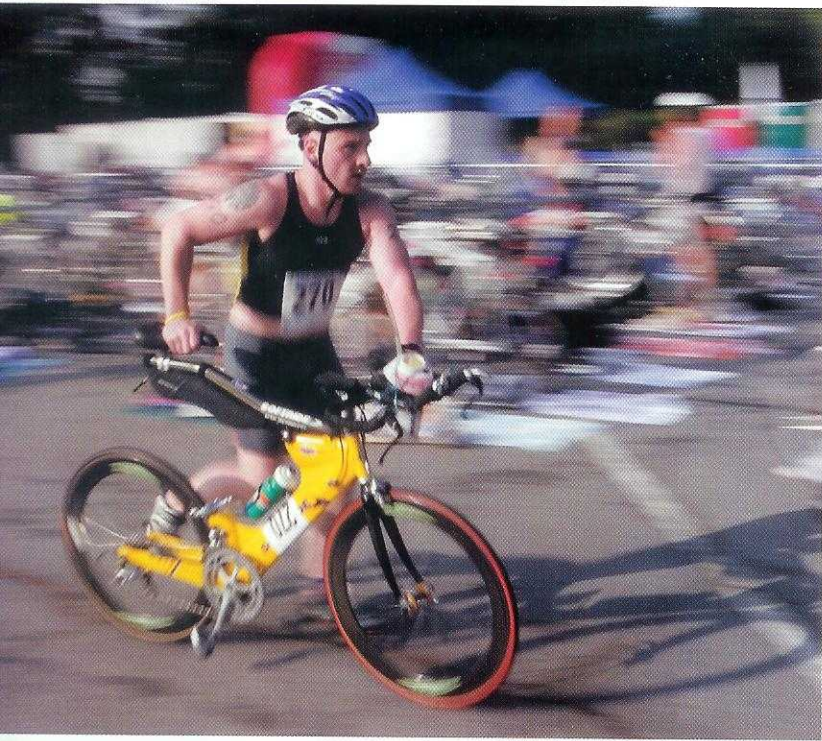
"The Lake Murray Triathlon is one of the best races in the Palmetto State series," says Jeremy Davis, race director with Set-Up Inc., producer of the event. "It's a sprint, the shortest distance for a triathlon, so it's good for beginners. But the prize money attracts some of the top amateurs and a few pros. It's also one of the more scenic races in the series."

No matter the distance, a swim-bike-run triathlon is a

grueling test of endurance. The Lake Murray Triathlon draws its share of superior racers, but most are like Bryon and Megan Leggett of Greenville, who compete for the personal challenge. This is the couple's second racing season, and they entered the Lake Murray event to improve their times over last year.

"I like the variety of the three segments," says 27-year-old Megan, a self-described "former couch potato" who had never competed in organized sports before training for and completing the Clemson Triathlon last spring. "Just when you begin to get tired in one event, you move on to the next. You're using three separate muscle groups with each segment."

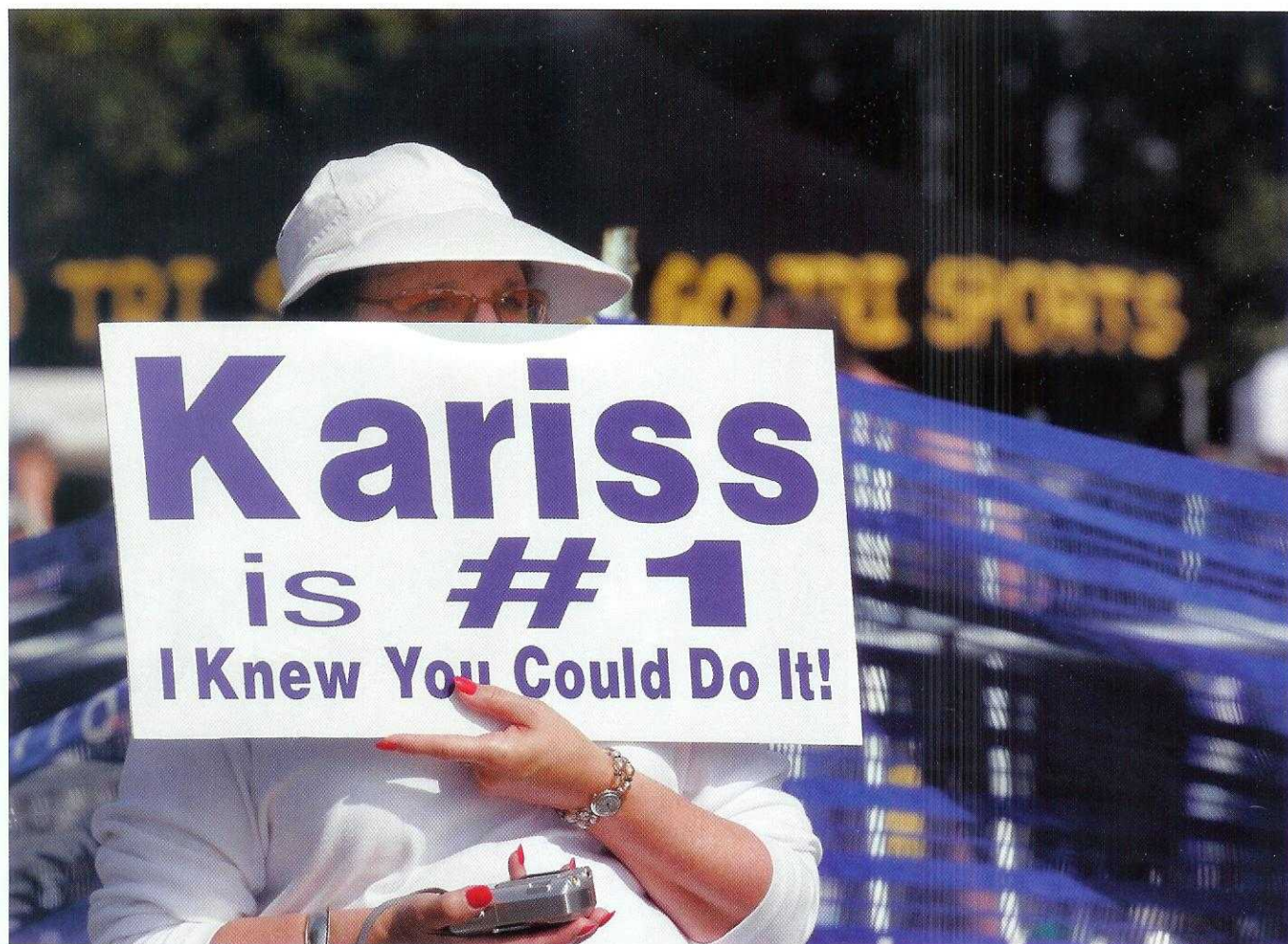
Her 31-year-old husband, Bryon, had some running



*Top: Matt Barker of Columbia rushes to the start of the cycling event. He was eighth overall in the men's 25-29 division. Above: The family of April Gillespie of Chapin cheers as she competes in her first triathlon. From left, husband Rick, son Robert, daughter Elizabeth and son Ricky. She finished tenth overall in women 30-34. Right: James Vavra of Florence placed first overall with a time of 1:09:34.*

experience before entering his first triathlon. "I was always curious about triathlons," he says. "I'm not a strong swimmer but I'm learning how to improve my technique with each race. I'd like to move up from the sprint races to some of the longer distances."

The first segment of the Lake Murray Triathlon is a challenging 750-meter swim. At the start of this year's race, a stiff wind pushes a roiling chop against the swimmers, making the course more difficult.



The start progresses in three waves – men, women and novices. For many in the water, including the Leggetts, the swim is the most intimidating part of the race.

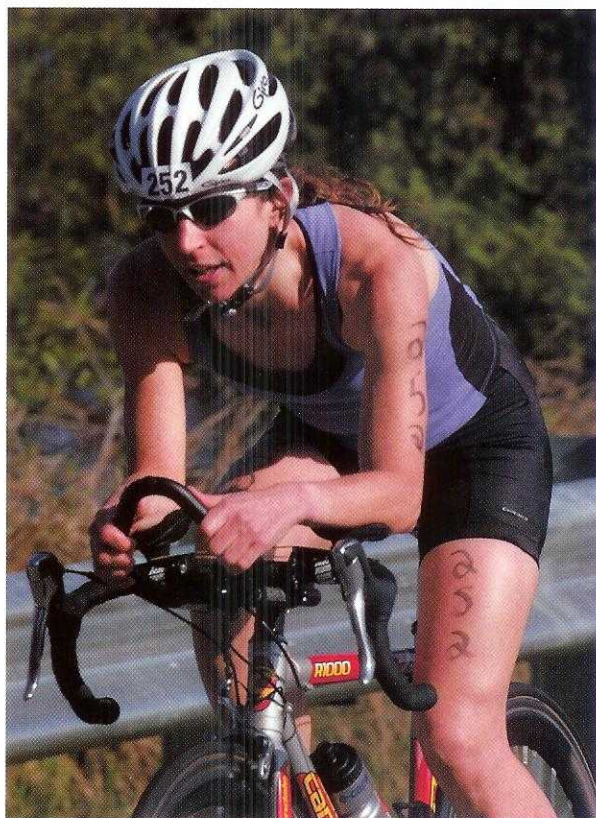
“It’s hard not to freak out at first,” says Megan. “There’s a lot of pushing and kicking at the start. You also can’t see very well, and there’s no black line or lane ropes to follow like in a pool, so it’s easy to get off course. I just try to get through it as best as I can.”

Once out of the water, racers hurry to the organized chaos of the transition area to prepare for the bike segment. Many seem focused and purposeful as they peel off their wetsuits and tug on socks, bike shoes, shirts, helmets and gloves. Others are clearly fatigued, needing time to regain their strength and composure. Family members and friends bark words of encouragement from the sidelines.

Davis calls the transition the fourth event of a triathlon. “You can lose a lot of time in the transition between segments,” he says. “There’s a lot of preparation that’s involved, so you have your clothes and equipment ready to go. Plus, you’re fighting the effects of fatigue.”

From the transition area, racers set off on a 16-mile out-and-back bike along the rolling roads around Dreher Island. The line-up of bicycles is as varied as the riders, ranging from sleek expensive racing bikes with razor-thin wheels to a few chunky mountain bikes.

*Top: Anita Marion roots for daughter Kariss Blalock of Columbia, who finished sixth overall in the women’s 25-29 age group. Right: Barbara Brandenburg of Columbia pushes toward the finish of the bike event. She finished third overall in women 35-39.*



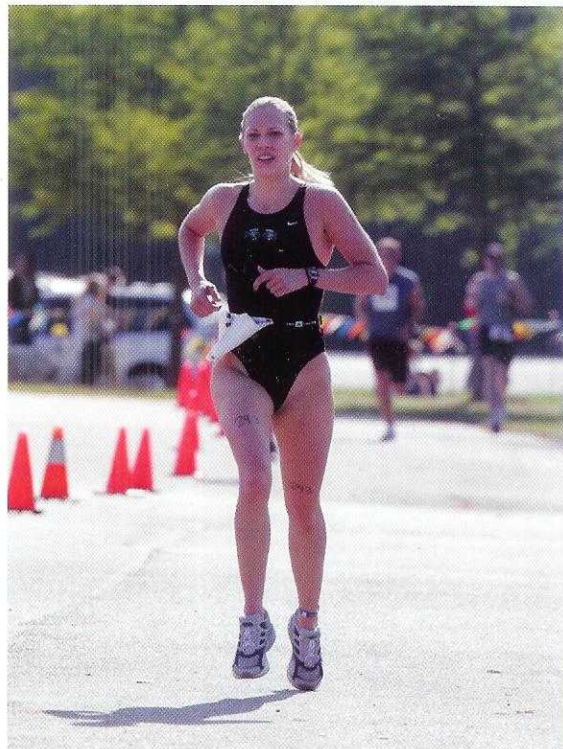


*Above: Like all triathlon participants, Dick Mandell of Columbia, the oldest, was "branded" with his age. He finished in 1:50:09. Right: Kinsey Eschenburg of Mount Pleasant placed first in women 20-24.*

The bike course in the triathlon is four miles longer than other sprint races in the series. But top competitors complete the course in just 40 minutes. The majority of the pack is back in the transition area within an hour.

Then, it's on to the three-mile run. With the end now in sight, most racers jog through the transition area, pausing only long enough to put up their bikes and take a few sips of water or a bite of energy bar before heading out again. As each racer nears the finish line of the run, his or her name is announced over a loudspeaker and a cheer goes up from the awaiting crowd. From the start of the swim to the end of the run, this triathlon takes two hours and 25 minutes for the entire field to complete the race.

In the men's division, 35-year-old James Vavra of Florence, a well-known racer on the Palmetto Series circuit, takes first place with a time





*Angela Henderson of Columbia checks the board for winners. She finished third overall in women 25-29.*

of 1 hour, 9 minutes and 34 seconds. Allison Hardy, 31, from Arden, N. C., wins the women's division with a time of 1:17:30. The youngest competitor is 11-year-old Jack Felix of Hilton Head, who is accompanied by his father, Nick. Both complete the race in 1:35:55. The oldest racer is 75-year-old Dick Mandell of Columbia, who finishes in 1:50:09.

Bryon and Megan are both pleased with their times. Bryon had trouble in the first transition and then dropped his water bottle early in the bike. Still, he finishes sixth in his age group and 61st among 198 men with a time of 1:27:07.

"For the second year in a row, I managed to put my head and my arm in the same hole of my bike shirt," he says. "Coming out of the swim, my equilibrium is really messed up. I'm delirious until about three miles into the bike. Then I dropped my water bottle, which affected my endurance going into the run."

Megan, meanwhile, shaves 16 minutes off her time from last year. She completes the race in 2:12:12.

"My goal was to finish under two hours," she says afterward. "I didn't quite make it, but I had a good race. The last 250 meters of the swim were tough, but I had a pretty good bike and run. I just want to keep getting better with each race." **LMM**