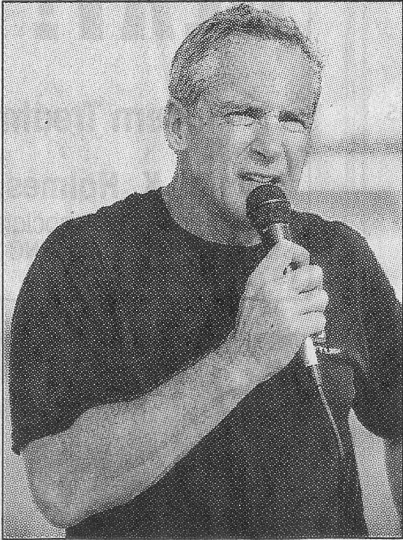


# Triathlete turns hobby into career as organizer



Bill Scott oversees the 2007 Kure Beach Double Sprint Triathlon.

(WILMINGTON) STAR-NEWS PHOTO BY BRIANA BROUGH

By J.P. GIGLIO  
STAFF WRITER

Bill Scott needed a hobby.

So he organized his first triathlon in Wilmington in 1994. One race turned into two, which turned into 10, and the hobby turned into a full-time gig by 1999.

Ten years later, Scott's production company Set Up Events is scheduled to put on 36 triathlons in North Carolina in 2009. All told, they will raise more than \$300,000 for affiliated charities.

Although the race circuit does not get under way until the spring, now is a busy time for Scott and his company. Last January, a flood of online registrants crashed Set Up's server. Registration for Set Up's 2009 North Carolina Triathlon Series opened earlier this month, and at a time when would-be triathletes fortified by New Year's resolutions are brav-

ing the January cold to train, seven events sold out on the first day of registration.

Not bad for a hobby.

"I love the sport," said Scott, 58, who lives in Kure Beach. "I thought it could be fun, but that's as far as I thought it would go."

Scott insists he was in the "right place, at the right time" to capitalize on the growth in the popularity of triathlons — three-part races with variable distances in swimming, biking and running. His friends and members of the triathlon community will tell you otherwise.

Scott turned his hobby into a success with both attention to detail and an affable personality.

"People are drawn to him," said Jeremy Davis, the director of the company's South Carolina triathlon series, and one of Scott's first employees at Set Up. "He has an easygoing personality. The best way to describe him is 'likable.'"

Set Up Events has come a long way since

Scott's first triathlon. It has five production teams, each with either four or five team members, that run 90 events in seven states. Set Up handles each race from soup to nuts.

Scott's group is typically contracted by an organization, such as the American Cancer Association, and provides everything from online registration to the T-shirts. Setting up the course and coordinating traffic patterns with the local police are the most time-consuming part of the process. Set Up also handles all the timing, scoring and marketing of the races.

Given the growth of the company, you might think Scott would be less involved than he once was. But his associates say that's hardly the case.

"He's hands-on," said Tom Crichton, who handles Set Up's marketing responsibilities out of Morrisville. "He's not out there sitting in a golf cart. One of the rea-

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sons he has been so successful is racers will go up to him and say, 'Hey, Bill ...,' and he listens to what they want."

North Carolina and triathlons were never in Scott's plans. He grew up in Mamaroneck, N.Y., a suburb of New York City in the southeastern corner of the state. He loved to race, even as a kid, and swam the breaststroke at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, where he met his wife, Lynda.

He stayed in Texas after graduating and began his corporate career at age 22 in Dallas. He started off with the sports marketing department of the Southland Corp., better known as the convenience retailer 7-Eleven. Scott took his first risk with 7-Eleven when he spearheaded the sponsorship of the U.S. cycling team in the 1984 Olympics. Today

## WILLIAM W. SCOTT

**BORN:** July 13, 1950, in Mamaroneck, N.Y.

**CAREER:** Founder and president, Set Up Events

**FAMILY:** Wife, Lynda; son, Derek, 36; daughter, Krysten, 29; grandson, Jake, 3; grandson, Drew, 1

**EDUCATION:** Texas Christian University, B.A. in fine arts, 1973

**WHAT HE'S READING:** Anything by John Grisham

**HOBBIES:** Watching football, swimming, golf

corporate sponsors and sports go hand-in-hand, but 25 years ago, Scott was ahead of the curve.

## Starting over at 42

When Southland was sold, Scott decided to leave the corporate world in 1992, before it told him to leave. At age 42, he started his life over and moved to Wilmington to open a sporting goods

store.

"It was a risk," Scott said. "But I was ready to get out of the corporate environment."

At that point in his life, Scott had already been competing in triathlons for 10 years. Since he completed his first in 1982, he has competed in more than 100. Hip-replacement surgery has ended his running career, but he still does the swimming and biking portions of the triathlons.

His interest in triathlons coincided with the sport's explosion this decade. Set Up currently counts 50,000 registered members in its database. Even in difficult economic times, with race fees for competitors typically ranging from \$50 to \$120 a triathlon, the demand for triathlons continues to grow.

"We didn't know what effect the economy would have on us," Scott said. "Knock on wood, so far we've been insulated. Our registration numbers went up this year."

Scott cites the addition of the triathlon to the Olympics in 2000 as a reason for its increased popularity. The flexibility in the distances of the swim, bike and run has also helped the sport grow. There was a time when the public's only exposure to the triathlon was the annual appearance on the "Wide World of Sports," with exhausted Ironman participants crawling to the finish line of a 26.2-mile run after biking 112 miles and swimming 2.4 miles.

Set Up Events produces four levels of triathlons — sprint, Olympic, half-Ironman and Ironman. The "sprint" races featuring half-mile swims, 12 miles on the bike and three-mile runs, are the most popular, Scott said.

Sprint or Ironman, Scott's ability to organize a triathlon and make it a "professional event" has helped put North Carolina on the map in the triathlon community, according to Cid Cardoso Jr., owner of Cary's Inside Out Sports shop.

## A top triathlon state

"If you were to rank the five best states for triathlons, North Carolina would be one of them," said Cardoso, who started the N.C. Triathlon Series in 1999. "Bill Scott's a big reason for that."

Cardoso said the quality of the races before the growth of Scott's company was uneven. Charities often depended on volunteers to get a race off the ground. Some charities had more success than others.

"Back in the day, I'd be in a Speedo in the middle of the woods in North Carolina," Cardoso said. "I didn't know where I was going."

Scott is glad his hobby turned out to be a boon for his fellow triathletes, but he doesn't take credit for the company's success.

"My wife's the real CEO," said Scott, who has been married for 39 years.

In the formative years of Set Up, it wasn't unusual to see Bill on the race course, Lynda work-

ing the registration table and their son, Derek, and daughter, Krysten, handing out water to the racers.

"It was a true family affair," Cardoso said. "They put in a lot of hours."

Sixteen years after he started Set Up, Scott's still hustling. Between Set Up's events and his own workout routine, he doesn't have free time for other hobbies, except watching football. He took his son and grandsons to a football weekend in Dallas early this season. Three generations of Scotts went to a high school game on Friday, a TCU game on Saturday and the Dallas Cowboys game on Sunday.

"That was a good trip," Scott said. "We'd like to make it an annual event."

Given Scott's track record, he will follow through on that promise.