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Dickey children making a big splash in the pool

By Jennifer Edwards (Contact) | The Natchez Democrat

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Months after most children have shuffled swimsuits to the bottom drawer, Mallory and Carter Dickey still have one for each day — and a couple of extras — ready and waiting.

The siblings both swim at meets across the state and in neighboring states with winning results as part of the Vicksburg Swim Association .

Mallory, 9, has been swimming competitively since she was 6, and it wasn't long after that little brother Carter, 6, jumped in too.

Mallory and Carter are the children of Trey and Leigh Dickey of Natchez.

Mallory began swimming as a bit of therapy for a hip click with which she was born, but she soon developed a love for the water that couldn't be quenched, Leigh said.

“Her personality has blossomed since she has gotten involved with a team,” Leigh said. “She knows what she wants to do and why she has to do the things to prepare for that. She's at home on a pool deck.”



Photo by Hannah Reel

Mallory Dickey, 9, practices her freestyle stroke. She was ranked first in 25, 50 and 100 meter freestyle events at the end of last season. This season just began.



Photo by Hannah Reel

Carter and Mallory goof around in the pool at the Natchez Senior Center

So much at home that she was ranked first or second in eight different events and third or fourth in six others at the end of last season. This year's season is just getting under way.

Mallory — or MC, as she prefers — swam freestyle, backstroke, butterfly and breaststroke in both short and long course events.

Carter is still too young for state rankings, but he swims freestyle, backstroke, butterfly and breaststroke.

Getting involved with a team has been a key in the development, Leigh said. Before joining VSA, Mallory had to swim individually at meets. She didn't have teammates, coaches and parents cheering her on, and she couldn't swim as part of relay teams.

"She made friends at all the meets we were taking her too and they could swim relays and she really wanted that," Leigh said. "She really wanted to be a part of the motivational side of a team."

Carter and Mallory's VSA coach Mathew Mixon said the siblings stand out in the pool not just because of the results, but because of how they have achieved those results.

"The amount of dedication and responsibility it takes to do what they do is unreal," Mixon said. "Swimming is what they want to do, and they have to make it work with school and travel, and they have the best attitudes about doing everything that is involved."

For Mallory swimming with teammates is summed up in one word — "fun" — she said.

"It's really, really fun to swim with my friends," she said. "I get to hang out with them, and we learn from each other in the pool."

Even in the pool the benefit of teammates is a big one, she said.

“I got to swim on a relay with the older girls, and I was the smallest one on the relay team,” she said. “When I was swimming, I could hear everyone yelling ‘Swim fast, little girl.’”

Knowing she has a support system helps when she’s standing on the starting blocks.

“I get so nervous, it feels like I really have butterflies in my stomach,” she said.

She also swims in open water events, and those add an even higher level of nerves.

“You are swimming with fish and snakes and alligators,” she said. “I can handle swimming with fish, but the snakes and alligators, that is kind of scary.”

Nerves aren’t so much a problem for Carter, he said. He’s more result driven.

“When I was little I finished third and won a ribbon, and that was just my first race,” he said. “I got to tell all my friends about it.”

Leigh said as long as her children have fun swimming, she’s in no hurry to get them out of the pool.

“This is what they do right now,” she said. “If at any point they want to stop, that is fine. And they know very much that is how we feel.

“They are 9 and 6. They are still children.”

But Mallory doesn’t have any plans of stopping anytime soon. For a fourth-grader, she has many long-term, big goals.

She wants to swim at the University of Texas and compete in the Olympics. Her reason is, once again, fun.

“I looks really fun to get out there and swim like they do,” Mallory said. “I think it would be fun to swim fast and set world records and stuff.”

She has attended several summer swimming clinics at the University of Texas and spent this weekend at a swim refresher clinic with the Texas women’s swim coach. She was one of 100 people invited to attend the clinic and is the only Mississippian and the youngest swimmer at the clinic.

Both children already have some Olympic exposure. They attended a swim clinic in Jackson and met Olympic gold medalists Ryan Lochte and Rex Tullius.

“I think it’s funny that (Rex Tullius) is named after a dinosaur,” Carter said.

He was also impressed with Lochte’s skills in the water.

“Ryan Lochte can swim really fast,” he said. “We were playing sharks and minnows and he put me on his shoulders and helped me catch Mallory because he can swim fast.”

Fun memories like that are the ones Leigh is happy to help create for her children.

“This is what we do as a family. This is what we do for fun. This is what we do for vacation,” Leigh said. “This is what we will do as long as they want to do it.”