

Is April a little early in the year to go for a swim in Smith Mountain Lake? Not for those hearty souls taking part in the Smith Mountain Lake Sprint Triathlon. If the water is cold during the 750-meter swim, the 20k bike race or 5k run will offer a chance to raise the body temperature.

Plus, the date of this year's event is April 30, so it's barely in April. The 2022 Smith Mountain Lake Triathlon is the 25th anniversary event, being held on the 24th time because of the cancellation of the 2020 race.

The SML triathlon is one of the Virginia Amateur Sports' signature events each year.

Registration is open for participants and volunteers (see below).

If you're at Smith Mountain Lake State Park on race day, take special care to look for the man donning bib No. 300. That number has special significance, as does the racer wearing it. Race founder Mike Morris will be sporting the 300 bib because it's his 300th triathlon.

Count race director Greg Hawkins among those most impressed with Morris's achievement.

"We were happy to give him bib 300," Hawkins said. "He hustles on the runs and he can crush the gears on the bikes."

Hawkins knows a thing or two about triathletes. He's been one since taking up the sport in 1995 while still in high school.

Hawkins was in Northeast, Maryland and tackled the North East Triathlon. He finished third and was hooked. He continued racing through college, then after working as a medicinal chemist for seven years, decided that working outside, facilitating races was preferable to life stuck in a lab.

"The ironic thing is I still spend Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and all the off-season inside and at a phone," Hawkins says. "But that's OK because it's in pursuit of triathlons, seeing people with smiles and getting healthy."

Hawkins first started the Virginia Triathlon Series with nine races here in the commonwealth. He then added a Maryland Triathlon Series. In 2007, Hawkins acquired Piranha Sports, a Delaware company, and decided to create Kinetic Multisport to move all the races under one corporate umbrella.

VAS and Hawkins started working together at this time.

"It's a great venue for an event," Hawkins said. "This has always been a wonderful early season event. Mike and Pete (Lampman) did a great job. It's been a well-run machine for years. We're just there to provide logistical support, bike racks, fencing, timing support. We want to make sure people go off on time and no one gets hurt."

Now Hawkins serves as race director, marketing coordinator, entry and volunteer recruiter, cross promoter, social media manager as well as myriad other duties, for 21 races, from early April through late October.

“We go from Raleigh to the Pocono Mountains,” Hawkins said. The company is based in Durham, N.C.

The firm administers triathlons, that’s all, just triathlons.

“We spend 21 weekends on the road at 16 different venues. There’s a race at Smith Mountain Lake in the spring and one in the fall,” Hawkins says. “A lot of other companies transition into just running events. I can’t do it. For us, 21 weekends is enough.”

The fall race at Smith Mountain Lake, the Kinetic Cup, is not affiliated with Virginia Amateur Sports. It’s focused on collegiate teams and is a draft-legal race. Hawkins says the NCAA is considering adding triathlon as a women’s varsity sport.

One of the services provided by Kinetic Multisports is the cross-promotion. “If someone is looking for a triathlon, they can go to our website and, even if this one doesn’t fit in their calendar, they can find others that are within a few hours at most. They can find all the events in this region as well as gear or apparel.”

Participants in other events can learn of Smith Mountain Lake, the Roanoke/Lynchburg region, and some will undoubtedly decide to come experience the event and enjoy the area.

Hawkins says the agreement between Kinetic Multisports and VAS is mutually beneficial.

“We’re a small company that punches above our weight,” he says, being a two-man operation who pulls in dozens of contractors and volunteers to make sure everything goes according to plan on race day.

If you’re one of those people who help or one of the racers, look for bib number 300 and tell Mike Morris congratulations on his accomplishment. And thanks for starting this event a quarter century ago.