

Let's be blunt: running is tough. Biking is often grueling. Swimming – especially open water swimming – can be as tough a slog as any physical activity. Combine them into a race and that's truly a race for the hardest among us.

Such is the nature of the triathlete. And for those who are interested in becoming a triathlete, or for those who already are among those hardy and disciplined souls, the Roanoke Triathlon Club is a great place to connect with peers for various activities surrounding triathlons throughout the year.

"They all offer something different," says Kathy Davis, president of the Roanoke Triathlon Club. Since starting the sport in 2015, Davis has competed in two Ironman full triathlons, six half races and enough sprints that she's lost count.

"I like the discipline of long course races. Just having the will to finish, there's something about it that's amazing," she says.

Davis is not alone in succumbing to the triathlon bug. Once it bites, the newly minted triathlete can be hooked.

With the Smith Mountain Lake Triathlon, a staple of Virginia Amateur Sports' annual events, coming on Saturday, April 30, triathlon training is front of mind in central and western Virginia. Combined with the optimism that the pandemic is receding, and we are all ready to get out and get active again, there is a surge in interest in triathlons in general and the SML event.

The Roanoke Triathlon Club is a perfect starting place for anyone looking to get involved in the sport.

"We are social, but we offer more than just a social club. We have members who don't do triathlons, but they support us and like doing things with us," says club president Kathy Davis. "We were teetering back and forth between an informal club and one with dues and a board. We're there now."

Dues are just \$25 a year and with that comes the ability to purchase a kit emblazoned with the club's self-designed livery, access to a private Facebook group, and training resources.

"We have swag," Davis says. "We have special club kits. Scott Moir and I worked on the design for months. There is a pattern with stars, mountains and the background have Roanoke landmarks like the H&C Coffee sign, things you know are from Roanoke."

Cycling clothes with club prints are also available.

"The club has a tent at different races," Davis says. "Family members' volunteer. We give out snacks, offer small bike support. The tent is a place where everybody can go. We even offer a place for car keys. It's also helpful to be a resource for out-of-town people."

The volunteer aspect is vital, too. Race administrators rely on a strong network of volunteers. Davis says she wants the Roanoke Triathlon Club to be a go-to for races in the region to find volunteers.

“If you don’t have people to volunteer, you don’t have a race,” Davis says. “My vision is we have a lot more members volunteering for other races. Everybody likes to race, but I want them to give back, too. The club can be a place to be a volunteer resource, then we will also give back to those people who volunteer. Maybe there will be raffles or give a free entry to a bike ride.

The role of a volunteer might be more than handling tasks – just cheering is important, too.

“There’s nothing more motivating than to cheer on somebody who you know what they’re going through. You’ll see some people doing their first tri and have some who are very established, but it’s great to cheer them on and it’s great when you’re in the race to hear those cheers,” she says.

“We’re a large community and I’d say about 75 people are really active,” Davis says.

The total number of members is closer to 125, but not everyone is active. Still, Davis says there were only about 30 members when she took over as president three years ago. The numbers have bounced around with events coming that foster interest, plus the pandemic that turned everything upside-down.

“We didn’t even charge dues during the pandemic. People could just give a donation if they felt like it and almost everyone did,” Davis says.

No matter how many triathlons a member has done, training is a must. The club has training resources to help with each area – a swim group at the YMCA, plus three cycling groups and three running groups all offer places where those disciplines can be explored and improved.

As the Roanoke Triathlon Club states on its web site ([roanoketriclub.com](http://roanoketriclub.com)): “Whether you’re a beginner looking to train for your first triathlon event, or a seasoned triathlete with Kona ambitions, we provide a supportive community where our local athletes can create extraordinary memories and lifelong friendships. Together we train, compete, volunteer, and socialize.”

The key is the word “together.” In an individual pursuit like triathlon training, “together” is a powerful force.