

San Pedro woman shatters world, national swim records in her mid-50s

By [Sandy Mazza](#), *Daily Breeze*
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Masters swimmer Traci Granger of San Pedro is one of the fastest swimmers in the world in her age category at 55 years. She has several national and international records and is looking to compete in world competition.

Traci Granger is out of bed at precisely 4:20 a.m. most days.

Even when it's 40 degrees and dark outside, she dons a bathing suit and shows up at the Victor E. Benstead Plunge outdoor pool in Torrance to meet her coach and swim team.

Then, the 55-year-old San Pedro resident and El Camino College professor swims. Not with breast or crawl strokes. She favors the more difficult butterfly stroke, gyrating her arms and legs up and down in unison like a dolphin.

Swimming was a fixture in Granger's childhood and teen years but, as a young adult, she focused on teaching aerobics and pursuing a career as an athletic director. She didn't take it up again until she was in her early 40s, and it wasn't with the intention of competing. But she's put together an impressive collection of medals and set more than a dozen records in her age bracket at United States Masters Swimming meets.

Granger's success is more surprising to her than it is to her husband, friends and co-workers.

“I think I’ve had maybe three or four world records,” she said recently. “Maybe 10 national records? They’re there to be broken, so someone’s gonna come along and break them.”

She set her first USMS national record in 2004 when she won her division in the 50-meter butterfly. She beat that time by nearly four seconds in 2007, setting another record. In her 50s, she continued to shine in butterfly stroke competitions, taking six more titles.

In 2013, even though she turned 55 and was recovering from hip surgery, she claimed two national records in her age bracket. The first was at the short-course nationals in Indianapolis in May, when she finished the 50-yard butterfly in just 27.45 seconds in the 55-59 age bracket. Then, in August, she completed the long-course 50-meter butterfly race in 30.97 seconds, winning a world record by besting a 2009 record set by Laura Val, one of the world’s top masters swimmers.

Last month, she toppled another world record at a USMS regional meet in Commerce by finishing the 50-meter butterfly in 31.13 seconds. She also took home five first-place medals that day.

“She’s got really incredible technique,” said Tyler Storie, coach of Granger’s team, the Los Angeles Peninsula Swimmers. “You can always count on her being there, and that says something because our practice is at 5 a.m. If you’re watching her swim, it might look like she’s going slow because she doesn’t splash or thrash around a lot and she’s got this great technique.”

Storie calls the butterfly “the most grueling stroke” and said Granger’s success is largely due to her drive to always improve herself.

Similarly, Granger’s co-workers say she’s reliable, hard-working and positive.

“She’s so exuberant and she portrays that in her classroom, too,” said Linda Olson, an administrative assistant at El Camino College who has worked with Granger since she started teaching first aid, CPR, swimming and other classes about a decade ago. “Every morning she’s here when I get in at 7.”

Granger said her biggest competition is herself, so she doesn’t put much stock in winning anything — unless she’s competing against her own teammates, in which case she’s only slightly bloodthirsty.

“It wasn’t my goal (to set records),” she said. The first time she set a record, she remembered hearing the announcement over the loudspeaker at the swim meet. “I said: ‘I did?’ It was sort of a shock because I didn’t expect it.”

When she swims, Granger says she focuses on swimming “smart” and executing proper starts, turns and finishes.

“I like going first thing in the morning, shutting my brain down about all the stuff I’ve got to do, and just swimming to make my interval,” she said.

As a teacher, she relishes teaching beginning swimmers because it’s so new and exciting to them. As a swimmer, she enjoys the camaraderie on her team and the friendly competition.

“People with great technique like her are typically driven by wanting to better themselves,” Storie said. “It’s not about how good she is compared to other swimmers, it’s how good she is compared to herself.

“She’s almost embarrassed when she gets these medals. She’s trying to improve herself and these meets are a way to test that out.”