

Together

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Together everyone achieves more

By Jennifer Merkel

Even the intimidating waters of a pool's deep end can seem a little less scary when you have a teammate by your side.

Sean LeDuc, a Roberts Wesleyan College senior, knows the comradery of a sports team well. He is a member of the Roberts Wesleyan golf and track and field teams.

LeDuc has also worked with the BOCES 2 Bridge to Earning, Living and Learning (BELL) program for four semesters and a light bulb went off: he wanted to build a Roberts Wesleyan swimming club team. His vision was to bring together RWC student-athletes and BELL program students to create a unified team, building relationships among students and expanding their experiences. The hope is to share the concept with other local college transition programs to create opportunities throughout the area.

Kym Woodard, BELL Program Director, worked with LeDuc to create a proposal and introduce the initial idea to parents. They developed a seven-week program and on Feb. 9, the club officially began with swim assessments. Students had varying levels of comfort in the pool, were encouraged to challenge themselves and advocated for themselves when they weren't up for the challenge.

The students' comfort and ability levels were quickly accommodated by the BELL staff, LeDuc, a lifeguard and a special guest that day, Monica Lepore. Known as Dock, Lepore was visiting from West Chester University in Philadelphia and works with Special Olympics aquatics athletes. She chatted with the students and helped them to set goals for the program.

Safety is of utmost importance to the program. Students performed the assessment to test their abilities swimming on their chest and on their back in both the shallow end and the deep end. They were also tested treading water in the deep end. At all times throughout the program, students will be under the watchful eyes of a lifeguard and coaches in and out of the pool.

One student declined to perform the deep end portion of the test but that didn't mean her time in the pool was over. LeDuc worked with her one-on-one, swimming laps from the shallowest part of the pool to where she felt comfortable. Each lap, she went a little bit further towards the deep end and each lap, she returned to the shallow end with the biggest smile on her face.

"I was freezing the whole time because I had goosebumps," said LeDuc. "It was amazing to see all of their abilities."



Monica Lepore speaks with a BELL student as the student prepares for her deep end assessment.

Sean LeDuc (left) cheers on his teammate as she practices swimming with a paddleboard.