



# TRIATHLONS FOR KIDS

Canada's largest youth triathlon promotes fun and fitness. BY Barb Gormley / PHOTOS by Trent Dilkie

**P**icture 600 regular kids – over 100 of them 3- to 6-year-olds – swimming, biking, running and smiling their way to the finish line of a triathlon. Add crowds of cheering parents and friends, over 200 hard-working

volunteers and a brilliant spring day and you have the 6th annual Caledon Kinetic Kids of Steel Triathlon (KOS), held in Caledon, Ontario, on May 28.

Former Olympic triathlon coach Barrie Shepley started KOS 20 years ago to support the then rela-

tively new sport of triathlon. As founder of the Ontario Association of Triathletes, he feared the small numbers of new participants didn't bode well for the sport's long term stability. He also wanted to create a fun way for kids to be active.

Today, there are nearly 10,000 kids participating each summer in KOS races held in 60 cities from Newfoundland to Vancouver. To keep the fun factor high, the race distances are much shorter than those in adult triathlons and gradually increase as the competitors mature.

The program, endorsed by Triathlon Canada, received a major publicity boost in 2000 when program graduate Simon Whitfield won Olympic gold in Sydney.

Nine-time Ironman champion Lisa Bentley, who lives and trains in Caledon, was at the Caledon KOS proudly supporting her favourite competitor, her 5-year-old nephew Braedan Spiteri.

"I support anything that gets kids active," says Bentley, whose next big event is Subaru Ironman Canada in Penticton, B.C. "It teaches kids how to deal with both joy and disappointment. Sport promotes family time too and bonds families together."

With child obesity growing at a rampant rate, participation programs like KOS are critical to developing healthy and active kids, says Shepley. He thinks that most kids are fit enough to finish a KOS triathlon and that their lifestyles support the multi-sport activity. "Every kid is a triathlete," says Shepley. "In the summer kids swim in their pools, run around their



**Nine-time Ironman champion Lisa Bentley encourages her nephew Braedan Spiteri in the 3- to 6-year-old category.**



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backyards and ride their bikes to local parks.”

Race director Stewart Barclay ran the day superbly with a huge fleet of other volunteers. He believes the event was the best-ever. “Corporate sponsors and volunteers are the life-blood of these kinds of activities,” says Barclay. “The town employees, the local volunteers and the many sponsors were absolutely world class. We sincerely thank them for all they have done for this great race.”



△ “I encourage every kid to participate in a Kids of Steel triathlon. It’s a great way for young kids to remain active instead of sitting in front of the TV or computer.”

*Andrew Woegerer, winner of boys 16-19 category and a national junior triathlon team member who started his racing career with KOS*



△ “Triathlon is a great sport for kids because it teaches them lots of skills they can use outside of the sport, but also because of everybody’s attitude. You always hear about parents in other sports fighting. In triathlon it doesn’t matter if it’s your kid, your friend’s kid or someone you don’t know – you cheer them on and support them all the same.”

*Krista Ruby, winner girls age 14-15 category*

Dear Barrie:

*Thanks so much for sending the picture of Ethan and me! Yesterday was great. The event was very well organized and all your volunteers were very knowledgeable. This kind of event is so important for kids. Not only does it reinforce a healthy active lifestyle, it showcases positive role models and boosts the kids’ confidence in what seems to be a very discouraging society for kids. Ethan wouldn’t let me wash off the body markings, and he had to wear a tank-top to school today to show them off. The first thing he did when he arrived at school was to tell everyone about his racing achievements, the speedy elite guys and how Lisa [Bentley] signed his race bib. Yesterday and today he has been elated. I think he felt like he fit in with the people there, that he met his goals and had a ton of fun. Thank you for making this event happen, and thanks to all the volunteers who kept it running smoothly.*

*Sincerely,  
Madelyn Smith, mother of KOS competitor Ethan Huffman FBC*