

# Virginia LMSC Communications

## *Annual Report 2013*

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Submitted by Betsy Durrant (newsletter editor) and Chris Stevenson (webmaster/electronic communications), Oct 2013

Effective communication runs two ways (eg, both top-down and bottom-up) and on multiple levels (eg, between Board members and among LMSC members).

The following methods of mass communication are facilitated collectively by the Newsletter Editor and the Webmaster:

- **Printed monthly newsletter**, *The Wet Gazette*, mailed to every registered member, unless s/he requests otherwise and “opts out” of receiving the printed newsletter. If members with the same last name have the same mailing address, only one copy of the newsletter is sent.
- **Monthly electronic mail** using the email marketing company *Constant Contact*. The monthly message includes a link to the electronic version of the printed newsletter. The email is sent to all members who provided an address during registration; members have the ability to unsubscribe themselves.
- Information presented on the **LMSC website**, [www.vaswim.org](http://www.vaswim.org). The current version of the website, which uses the WordPress platform, launched in January 2011. Besides containing a number of mostly static informational pages, news items blurbs are posted every month on the home page. Members can sign up to be notified when an item is posted via RSS or email alerts; instructions to do this are posted on the website. At present there are about 30 who subscribe to email alerts; typically about 40 people will click on the Facebook version of a post.
- The Virginia LMSC has a **Virginia Masters Swimming Facebook page**; webpage news items are also posted there. The page currently has 236 “likes” (followers), an increase of almost 50% from the 160 followers of last year.
- There is a **Chris Greene Lake Cable Swim Facebook group**, currently with 155 members, 28 more than last year. The CGL group was established in 2010 while the LMSC page was created in June 2011.
- The LMSC has a **Flickr Pro account** to store photos online; there are currently 1305 photos in 47 sets; 529 photos (11 sets) were uploaded in the past year.

The newsletter, monthly emails and website function very well for top-down communication; opportunities for bottom-up communication are a little more limited, but the LMSC Board members and club representatives are all prominently listed on the website with email addresses, and there is a separate contact page for LMSC officers that is used by visitors to the website. Communications among LMSC board members usually takes place by email and conference calls. Communications between members can occur on the two Facebook pages, and of course at events such as meets.

### **Printed Newsletter (*The Wet Gazette*)**

Monthly issues of the *Wet Gazette* were sent to printer each month within the first few days of each month. Unfortunately, the actual date when members receive the newsletter is quite varied. The newsletters are bar coded and sent bulk mail from Richmond. The further a member is from Richmond, the longer it seems to take.

Sometimes they do not arrive in Virginia Beach until the end of the month. We see no solution for this since we do not want to pay postage for First Class.

Producing the newsletter is joint effort. Betsy encourages teams and individuals to send articles and photos. The biggest problem with photos is identifying the swimmers. It is important for the photographer to send the names with the photo. If Betsy goes online to Flickr accounts, sometimes they are labeled and sometimes they aren't. Betsy gathers the information sent and begins putting the newsletter together the last week of each month. The format that the printer uses requires the newsletter to have the number of pages in multiples of 4. Sometimes Betsy has to decide to cut or add articles to make it come out correctly.

When the newsletter is ready, Betsy converts it to a PDF file and emails it to the printer in Richmond. Meanwhile the Registrar prepares a file of the addresses and sends it to Chris. Chris removes the names and addresses for those who have opted for the electronic version. Chris then sends the addresses to the printer who prints, addresses, bar codes and mails the newsletter.

A few days after sending the black and white copy to the printer, Betsy removes the black and white photos and substitutes color photos. She emails this version to Chris for posting on the website.

Printing and mailing the paper newsletter is one of the LMSC's largest expenses. Last year we identified three possible strategies for reducing this expense: (a) increase the opt-out program, (b) reduce the newsletter size, and (c) reduce the scope of the mailing list slightly by mailing only to LMSC residents. The Board voted to implement the first two of these measures.

The success of the opt-out program is described below. Regarding newsletter size, Betsy has made a great effort to keep the newsletter to eight pages: in the 12 months since the last Board meeting, 10 newsletters met the target size. Combined, these two measures have reduced the newsletter line item by about 50%: ***the 2013 EOY projection for newsletter cost is \$3030, compared to an actual cost of \$6021 in 2012*** for a savings of \$3000. This translates roughly to a savings of \$3 per member.

### ***Newsletter Opt Out Program***

The "opt out" program – where a member voluntarily eschews receiving the mailed, printed newsletter – saves the LMSC a significant amount of money. This year for the first time we included a question asked during electronic USMS registration/renewal: "I would like to receive a link to the newsletter electronically instead of a mailed paper version." This is a significant departure from previous years in which the onus was on the members to contact the webmaster to indicate their preference to opt out.

As of Oct 1, 2013: 818 (71.6%) of our members answered "YES" to that question during registration, a large increase from the 167 (14.9%) opt-outs from last year. The webmaster also tries to identify LMSC family members living in the same household in order to avoid sending multiple copies of the newsletter to the same address; approximately 10 mailings per month are avoided in this manner.

Chris now maintains the latest version of the printed newsletter at the following (stable) URL, which we can encourage members to bookmark so that they can read it electronically every month:

<http://www.vaswim.org/newsletters/Current.pdf>

Betsy maintains a list of about 20 people outside our LMSC who receive the newsletter. She emails them the color copy.

Concern for pinching pennies MAY reduce communication to our members if we are not careful. Some members who opt out of receiving the paper newsletter may be less likely to click on a link in an email and view the content online than they would to sit down and read the newsletter over their morning copy. It is difficult to know how many people in the past received a paper copy and then failed to read it, but we do have some metrics on reading the electronic copy: **about 22% of the recipients of email announcements click on the provided link to the newsletter.** Of course, some of the others may read the newsletter directly, by surfing to the LMSC website and navigating to the newsletter. It should be noted that a handful of the opt-outs – maybe two dozen or so – do not wish to be bothered with LMSC news announcements of any kind: they will “opt out” but not provide USMS with an email address, or they will click on the DO NOT CONTACT link of the emails from the LMSC.

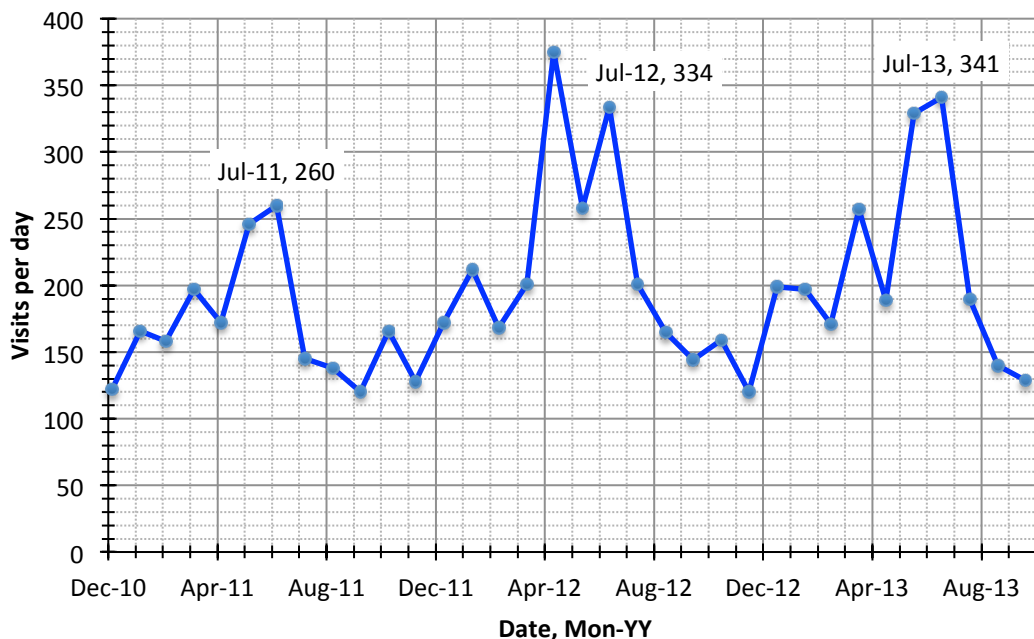
## LMSC Website

The current version of the website launched in 2011, and there were no changes in the basic structure of the site this year. There were a few tweaks: some of the links on the front page were re-formulated to be asked as questions (similar to a FAQ) so that people could more readily locate links associated with common tasks. The particular questions were based on which pages on the site see the most traffic and email queries sent to the webmaster (there are not many of these).

One deficiency in the website is that it does not display well on smaller hand-held devices such as smartphones, though it does find on iPad-sized tablets and computer screens. A future project is to either re-design the site to make it “less busy” and more phone-friendly, or to create an alternative site for mobile surfing and divert smartphone users to that site.

The following figure shows website traffic since the website was relaunched. The number of visits increases greatly every year in June and July in conjunction with the Jack King and Chris Greene OW swims.

### Visits to LMSC Website, 2011-present



Visits to the site grew slightly this year: 218 visits per day so far in 2013, compared to 209/day last year and 169/day in 2011. Traffic has more than doubled since the re-launch in 2011.

Exposure to our content also occurs through our Facebook page, since the “What’s New” items are also mirrored onto the FB page. Over 20% of our traffic comes from FB users clicking on links to our website, slightly greater even than clicks from the USMS website. The actual “reach” of these posts through Facebook is even greater, since only about 10% of the people who view the “What’s New” posts actually click through to reach our website.

## Monthly Email Digests

We use *Constant Contact* ([www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)) to send a monthly email to our membership; this is a switch from the organization (*iContact*) that we have used in previous years. The cost is slightly higher (\$5 per month more) but iContact made it too difficult for members to manage their subscription to LMSC emails.

The format of the email was enhanced to look more attractive and include small photos. The email consists largely of a collection of the “What’s New” items that were posted to the website (and also on the Facebook page); some items that were time-sensitive are deleted, while others (eg results or event announcements) are combined and streamlined. The monthly email digests are archived on the website, as are “What’s New” news items. The latter are searchable, and filterable by date and category.

As directed by the LMSC Board, emails in Jan-Mar went out to both 2012 and 2013 members. In March, a separate email was sent to members who had not renewed, warning them that this would be the last direct communication from the LMSC; from April, emails were only sent to current members.

Over the past 12 months, an average of 47% of the recipients (or 390 members) opened their monthly email while about half that (22%, 175 members) clicked on one or more links. Both sets of numbers are slightly higher than last year over the same time period. The second set of numbers is significant because it represents the people who “interact” the most with their electronic email newsletter. The average number of “bounced” messages is 14 per month; since January, a total of 29 members have unsubscribed from receiving email alerts while four recipients reported the monthly emails as unsolicited spam.