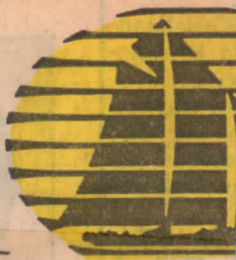


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SERVING THE MISSISSIPPI

Swimmers brave chilly

By GEORGE LAMMONS

SUN HERALD WRITER

It was an unusual sight for a February afternoon — three men in the chilly waters of the Mississippi Sound across from Edgewater Mall, hands folded during a minute of silent meditation.

Moments later they were swimming, despite temperatures in the 50s and a strong south wind.

And if their banner, pitched at the site of their meditation, hadn't said, "International Year of Peace Swim," passers-by wouldn't have known what they were doing.

But the three, Adhiratha Keef, Sunil Davidson and Shradha Howard, are celebrating the international year of peace declared by the United Nations and training for a crossing of the English Channel this summer.

"It really felt quite warm for a while," Howard said as he pulled on his clothes, shivering, after completing his swim. Water temperatures in the Sound were between 52 degrees and 58 degrees when they swam. Lake Pontchartrain, where they swam earlier in the afternoon, had water

temperatures of 50 degrees.

The English Channel temperature will be in the mid- to low 50s.

After swimming about 1½ miles in Lake Pontchartrain Saturday, the men swam for about an hour in the Sound. This morning they were scheduled to take a dip in Mobile Bay, Ala., before heading home to New York City and the United Nations, where they work.

They started their celebration Jan. 1 in Japan with a swim in Hiroshima. It was in Japan that they decided to celebrate peace in their channel-crossing and as they trained for the crossing.

"They (the Japanese people) were very inspired by it (the swim)," Davidson said.

He said the temperature was so cold in Hiroshima they could see their breath. But the response was so tremendous they swam again Jan. 6 in Nagasaki, the other Japanese city devastated by an American atomic bomb during World War II.

In Nagasaki, he said, "it was snowing, but it wasn't too bad. You get used

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Gulf Coast Sound to inspire peace

to the cold by training."

But the swimming has become more than just training for the 22-mile swim across the channel.

Every weekend the three, along with a non-participating friend, Dhruva Hein, travel to another location. They have to work during the week and the water temperature close to home is too cold, so they travel.

Last weekend they swam in Florida and Georgia.

And they are financing their mission themselves.

They credit their meditation teacher, Sri Chinmoy, with helping them find the strength and desire to continue the rigorous training. Sri Chinmoy leads the Peace Meditation group for U.N. delegates and staffers.

The meditation is not a religious practice, says Hein, but an accessory to religion. It was through their meditation group that they adopted their Sanskrit names, and it is through their meditation group that they have learned to "transcend" earlier accomplishments.



KELLY HARDING/SUN HERALD PHOTOGRAPHER

Adhiratha Keefe, Sunil Davidson and Shraddha Howard (l-r) at swim.



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Adhiratha Keefe, Sunil Davidson and Shraddha Howard (l-r) at swim.