

Gold Medalist Helps Local YMCA Wade Through Recession

By Elizabeth Chang

Olympic gold medalist Natalie Coughlin and members of the UC Berkeley women's swim team attended a meet and greet yesterday as part of a local organization's fundraiser.

The Berkeley-Albany YMCA put on its first Swim-A-Thon, a week-long event that is aimed at raising money and awareness about the importance of youth programs, according to a YMCA press release.

The money will be used to offer discounted fees for swim lessons or camps to those who are unable to afford membership, said Kevin Kosik, chief development officer of the Berkeley-Albany YMCA.

At yesterday's forum, Coughlin and the team answered questions about their experiences and spoke of the rewards of swimming.

"We're very excited to have (Coughlin) here," said Joedy Michael, associate aquatics director of the Berkeley-Albany YMCA.



Along with the meet and greet, the event features community swimming, a water safety demonstration and lessons from professionals on ways to improve swimming techniques.

In the hopes of raising more than \$3,000 for the non-profit organization, participants will swim more than 60 miles-or 4,000 laps-in a standard-sized pool, Kosik said.

Twenty-five participants, financially supported by 80 people, pledged to swim portions of the distance throughout the week, according to Kosik.

Kosik said the event is important for the YMCA, which provides program services that build strong communities, health and wellness.

"It's a tough time for a lot of nonprofits, but the good thing is that the YMCA is one of those safety nets who provide vital services to people who need them most in the economic downturn," he said.