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To: USMS Members

From: Rob Copeland, Legislation Chair

Governance—Historical Perspective

United States Masters Swimming (USMS) is unique within the world of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and non-profit organizations, in that we are managed, controlled, and operated almost exclusively by volunteers who are also active participants in our programs. We are not funded by disinterested donor contributions. We have no large national sponsors. We run with an extremely small national office staff, with the bulk of the work performed by highly dedicated and motivated volunteers (unpaid staff.). This provides us with distinctive challenges of maintaining and improving on an organization without peers.

In our first 30 years, we have grown from a small group of swimmers with a vision for the future, almost wholly dependent upon Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and United States Swimming (USS) for structure and support, into a fully self-sustaining non-profit NGB. We have grown our membership and programs, while maintaining our vision for the future and maintaining our mission to promote fitness and health in adults by offering and supporting Masters swimming programs.

During the '70s, USMS leadership and management were highly centralized. A very small group of highly motivated individuals expended a tremendous amount of time and energy to found Masters and lead us through our infancy. For most of these years Masters was part of the AAU, until Congress passed the Amateur Sports Act of 1978, providing that no organization could govern more than one Olympic sport. From 1978 until 1981 Masters existed under USS. In 1981 USMS incorporated and we started to be self-governing.

Through the 80s we have expanded upon this model, to add numerous committees and a few paid employees and contractors, while still relying on the leadership and management of a small group of volunteers. Milestones during this period were the establishment of a national office in 1985 and writing our own Rule Book in 1989. In the 90s we continued to grow both in membership and in services, adding to our staff and governing body. Throughout this period of growth, evolution and maturity, there has been one constant; the commitment of volunteers who run and govern our organization and its activities.

As many of you know, a subcommittee on Structure and Governance began work after the 2003 USMS convention. The purpose of this task force is to look into the roles and responsibilities of the USMS leadership and in a broader sense, the entire governance of USMS. We are taking to heart the wise words of John F. Kennedy. "The time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining." The sun is shining bright on Masters Swimming; USMS is a strong, healthy organization and there is no better time than now to make us even stronger.

Rob Copeland