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SUMMIT MEDIA

Primetime TV star Alfred Vargas' barbecue business is hot

Dividing into entrepreneurship

Turned off by an office job, she worked her way into the swimming instruction business by becoming a competitive swimmer first

By Rafael Santos

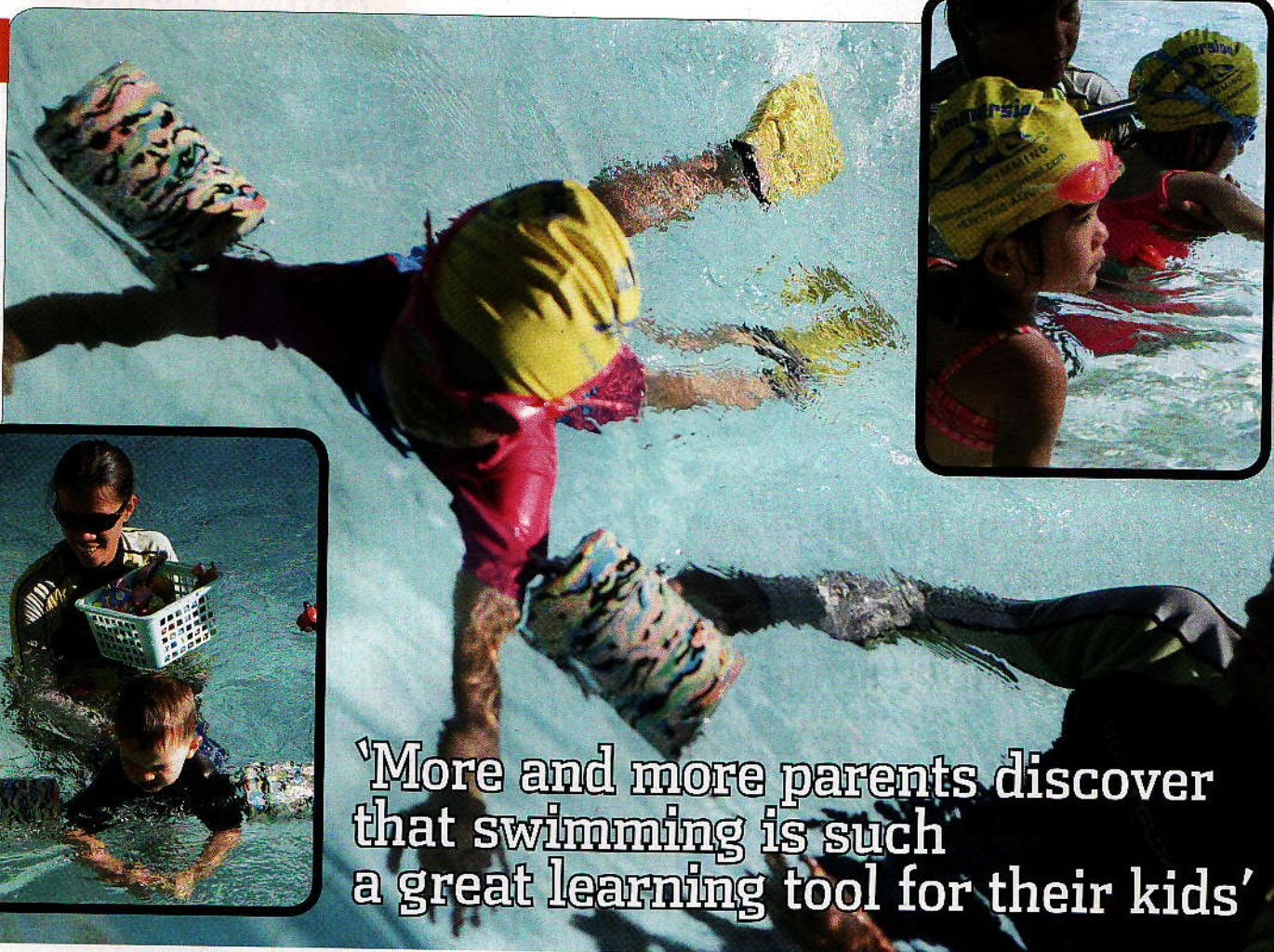
When former varsity swimming team captain Ria Mackay decided to quit her day job and teach swimming lessons full time in 2000, she faced a major obstacle: she didn't have the prestigious name that her competitors possessed.

"I knew that I needed something to set me apart from the competition," Mackay recalls. "Although I had been teaching every summer for 17 years to earn a supplementary income, I wasn't a famous swim-

PHOTOS: THADDEUS DE ARDASIO

SPORTS
businesses

RIA MACKAY:
'I was bored at my job, and I realized that I wanted to do something proactive'



'More and more parents discover that swimming is such a great learning tool for their kids'

mer. I therefore thought I should come up with something unique to offer."

So Mackay went to the United States to get her competitive edge: training to become a licensed swimming coach in Total Immersion, a revolutionary form of swimming that emphasizes form and aesthetics to enhance swimming performance. She spent \$5,000 for the two-month course that thoroughly taught her the Total Immersion way of swimming as well as its special techniques for teaching babies and toddlers how to swim.

"I had to invest to give myself an edge because credentials count for a lot in this kind of business," she says. "With Total Immersion swimming, I am selling something truly unique and worth the price paid by my swimming students: learning economy of movement that achieves an even more efficient swim."

Indeed, since opening Aqualogic Swim Co. in 2000, Mackay has been doing brisk business providing Total Immersion swimming lessons primarily to learners from 6 months to 13 years of age. In particular, her summer swimming classes have been attract-

ing more than 200 students each year despite her above-market teaching fees. The cost of her swimming courses range from P5,000 to as much as P12,500 for eight sessions, compared to the P2,500 to P4,000 charged by other comparable swimming schools.

"Most of our clients are from the AB market because they are the ones who recognize the benefits of our swimming program," she explains. "Our philosophy is to make the pool a fun and exciting place for kids so we can get rid of their fear of the water, which as we all know isn't a natural human environment. We emphasize horizontal swimming. What makes it hard for some people to learn how to swim is that we're not oriented to be horizontal; we're trained to be vertical all the time."

Mackay grew up "surrounded" by water. She started swimming competitively when she was only nine, and she went on to become the captain of the De La Salle University varsity swimming team. Then she graduated and became a marketing professional.

Office work turned out to be not to her

liking, though. She recalls: "I was bored at my job, and I realized that I wanted to do something proactive. So I fell back on my training as a competitive swimmer." That was when she decided to become a full-time swimming instructor.

To get into the swimming instruction business, Mackay forked out an initial P50,000, mostly to buy imported pool toys that she needed for her teaching lessons. From then on, she relied primarily on referrals to promote her swimming lessons.

"What makes us unique is that we make the water fun for children," she says. "We don't just throw them onto the water and watch them from afar; we are in there with them. And our teaching methods for children can be applied to all ages because it's more interactive and goal-oriented. We find that kids respond better to this method."

The swimming program of the Aqualogic Swim Co. is divided into three age brackets: Aquababes (6 months to 3 years old), Aqua Kids (3 to 12 years old), and Aqua Tech (13 years old and up). The company uses the swim-

ming pools of three upscale establishments for the program: the Makati Shangri-la Hotel and Galleria de Magallanes, both in Makati City; and The Palms Country Club in Alabang, Muntinlupa City. Training is conducted all year round, Mondays to Saturdays.

From time to time, Mackay also teaches swimming classes around the South East Asian region. Today, she intends to put up a swimming facility of her own. "I plan to have a facility in place in the next two years, so we are currently looking for good partners to help us," she says.

Mackay is confident that the demand for her services will continue to grow. "When I started in 2000, I had less than 20 students, but now our summer classes are drawing as many as 200 students," she says. "I expect this number to grow even more in the coming years as more and more parents discover that swimming is such a great learning tool for their kids." ■



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PHOTOS: JUN PINZON



COVER STORY

Fencing for profits

VIER TAJONERA and BEVERLY ALARCON: They started with an investment of P4,000 in a classified-ad posting, plus e-mail announcements

A club of fencing enthusiasts turns out to be a profitable move for former members of a champion national team

By Louise M. Francisco

To create a fencing team of her own and to continue sword-fighting were Beverly Alarcon's strongest motivations in establishing Ezkrima Inc., a fencing club that the former Southeast Asian Fencing gold medalist and two former teammates put up in 2006. Today, apart from promoting the sport and fostering a sense of belongingness among its fanciers, the club is now turning out to be a profitable business as well.

Alarcon's interest in fencing began in 1990 during her freshman year, when a former classmate of hers at the Ateneo de Manila University recommended the sports to her. Fascinated