

Triangle Triathlon gets new location

Annual event moves to Harris Lake

BY RACHEL ULLRICH
STAFF WRITER

Cid Cardoso Jr. realized there was a problem.

As a sponsor and participant in the annual Triangle Triathlon, he used to swim the lake at Lake Crabtree County Park at least twice a year — on the day of the event, as well as the day before to track out the race course.

Although Cardoso likes swimming the lake, he realized he probably was in the minority.

“The perception is that it’s not a nice place to swim,” Cardoso said. “But I’ve done that swim at least the past 10 years — I don’t have a third arm growing or anything.”

But as Cardoso, an elite-level amateur competitor and owner of Cary’s Inside-Out Sports, knows, perception matters.

“The feedback we were getting from participants was that the lake was icky, dirty,” he said. “And at the end of the day, we want to put on a race where people want to go.”

And so shortly after last year’s event, the search began for a new location.

That search finally ended at Harris Lake County Park in New Hill, where the event will take place at 7:30 a.m. Sunday.

“So far, the feedback I’ve gotten has been overwhelmingly positive,” Cardoso said. “Most cyclists in the area are familiar because it’s a very popular lake, but I don’t think most people in the Triangle knew about it. Most people are saying, ‘Wow, I didn’t know there was that much room in there.’”

For Bill Scott, owner of Set Up Events, Inc., that’s exactly the reaction he wants.

Set Up Events, which puts on the triathlon, as well as 27 others in the state, has seen growth in all but one of its triathlons in recent years. Only the Triangle Triathlon had stalled.

“If all the other numbers are up except for one, obviously you’ve

got a problem,” Scott said. “With Triangle, it was pretty easy to see why. We’d gotten so much negative feedback about the lake.”

Most of that stemmed from talk of pollution in the lake. Fish taken from it have registered toxic levels of the pollutant polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) because of toxic waste dumped into the lake decades ago.

Though tests show there is “a very low cancer risk” due to contact with the water of Lake Crabtree, Scott and Cardoso said perception that the lake is unsafe matters.

“We were continually faced with problems at Lake Crabtree,” Scott said. “There were possibly PCB problems at the lake, and even without the potential problems, that is just a nasty lake. People didn’t enjoy swimming it.”

Now that’s all changed with the move. Everyone who’s gone out to the course has “loved” it, according to Scott.

More important, the race has sold out for the first time in several years. With a self-imposed cap of 1,100 participants, it didn’t take long for the event to surpass last year’s total.

The route, which includes a 750-meter swim, a 17.5-mile bike ride and a 5K run, passes through the center of Harris County Park and along some back roads nearby.

Cardoso said the biking roads also should impress participants. Biking on Weston Parkway at the previous site “was not a fun course,” Cardoso said. “It was a hard course. You’re constantly going either up or down.”

Cardoso called the roads around Harris Lake more “country,” which means less traffic.

“People tend to like this ride. So far, really, all the feedback has just been, ‘We’re so glad you moved this race.’”