

## **C Edward Johnson's Hall of Fame Story - 2014**

Written October 2014

For C. Eddie Johnson, proximity to water started him in this lifelong sport. Eddie grew up near Lake Phalen in St. Paul and later raised his kids by Lake Phalen. Minnesota lakes and pools provided solid home territory. In his youth, Eddie's older brothers were in Boy Scouts, but Eddie was too young. The Boy Scouts were short divers for a big local competition. Eddie's sister, Mary Jane, encouraged Eddie to dive in the Boy Scout swimming and diving competition at Lake Phalen. Eddie's water career started at a very early age as a champion diver. Eddie swam through high school and college. He graduated from Johnson High School in St. Paul, the class of 1937. He attended Gustavus College and graduated in 1946. As a college swimmer, he swam the 50 yard freestyle and maintained backstroke records.

In the 1940s, Eddie joined other young men in the army. His initial job was teaching survival swimming at a base in Texas. He taught pilots how to turn their clothing into flotation devices. After a while he was sent to Italy where he was a railroad and electricity expert.

Swimming was a lifelong event for Eddie. He used to take his kids for morning swims at Lake Phalen. He even took his boys to Lake Phalen in fully clothed so they could practice survival swimming. Eddie owned one of the first Volkswagen Beetles. He was a familiar sight as he took his boys down to Lake Phalen to swim. Eddie's son remembered also heading to the Eastside YMCA, which was the old Johnson High School. They'd go for "Dads and Lads" swimming. As was common in the day, swimsuits were not worn. Eddie shared his love of swimming with his boys.

Eddie was also politically engaged. He had a knack for getting on the Minnesota Public Radio phone-in programs. How do we know that? He was so excited to tell fellow swimmers who heard him on the radio the techniques he used of getting past the screener when calling in. Eddie was also a supporter of United Nations Association. At one point he saw Kofi Annan and called in his Minnesota and Macalester connections so he could get his attention. A picture of Eddie and Kofi Annan became a treasured memento.

As an adult swimmer, he was deep into technique. Into his 80s he kept working on improving. In Masters Swimming, Eddie had 58 Individual National Top 10 times with two All-American swims. Eddie was a sprinter through and through. All these Top Ten times were either in 50s or 100s, most being 50s. He was known for his sprinter's workout – short. Reliable sources witnessed him on more than one occasion doing about 100 yards total for the entire workout.

Swimming was important to Eddie from early childhood until his 90s. His sons have video of him swimming two days before his 93rd birthday with a beautiful rhythmic freestyle stroke. Eddie was a swimmer, traveler, a woodworker; making boxes and shelves, and he was an amateur photographer.