

PALMETTO BAY

## Council praises Palmetto Bay Senior High boys' swim team

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Palmetto Bay Mayor Eugene Flinn has been itching to publicly state his appreciation of the Palmetto Senior High School boys' swim team. At a Monday night council meeting at the Deering Estate Visitor's Center he finally made his splash.

“We're very proud of the boys' swim team, and I've been dying to say this for over a month now: Congratulations, 42 years it's taken for the boys' swim team to end the drought -- the state championships, brought home to Miami-Dade County.”

Flinn and his council honored the team with a proclamation for taking home the state title from the 2009 FHSAA Class 3A swimming finals that were held in Orlando in November. “These boys are the greatest bunch of guys, and I've been around coaching for a lot of years,” head swim coach David Booher said. Last year, the team fell one point short of a state title.



They told their coach, then, “We're very happy, coach, but we'll bring back the gold next year,” and that's what they did and they had state records and made the community proud,” Booher said.

Palmetto's Panthers were paced by senior sprinter Michael Saco, who finished with four golds but most notably broke the state record in the 50-yard freestyle in 20.11 seconds. Saco has signed to swim for Florida State University.

Mom Dacy Saco beamed. "I feel great," she said, giving credit for the accomplishment to "all the hard work these kids put into swimming."



Flinn's council also acknowledged the sacrifices the parents made to help these kids succeed in the pool. "I wondered how many miles were spent and how early the parents got up," Flinn said before he was interrupted with a knowing shout from the back.

"4:45, Mr. Mayor!"

"When we were younger, we'd say, is it even worth going to bed," Flinn responded, laughing.

"I can't think of a sport any more demanding than swimming. You guys get up at crazy hours to do what you do. It's a great sport, and this team brought great honor to the school and to the community. No one works harder than the swimmer."

Sometimes those miles and miles of tedious stroking down the black line on the bottom of the pool is passed from one generation to the next. Take Stephen Lichtner, a champion swimmer himself and a former Hurricanes Swim Club age group coach in the 1970s. He and wife

Debra watched as their son Stephen earned honors with his Palmetto teammates. The team's state win, dad said, was significant because it has been the domain of private schools since the late 1960s.

"It's tough for public schools to get that many good athletes," Lichtner, 55, said. The younger Lichtner, who finished third in both the 100-yard freestyle (46.15) and 50 free (21.14), recently signed a letter of intent to swim for the University of Florida.

Another father-son swim dynasty continued as Palmetto's Austin Manganiello finished ninth in the 100-yard backstroke with :53.30. Dad, Lou Manganiello, 51, coaches swimming for Westminster Christian School in Palmetto Bay and won swim awards himself as a back stroker in the 1970s.

Teammate Asher Garcia, 17, swam the 100-yard butterfly in a second place time of 51.13 and said the title and Monday's honor by Palmetto Bay will be "a good memory to have."

The prognosis suggests it could be a while before Palmetto reprises the honor since many of the seniors like Garcia, Saco and Lichtner will graduate this year. Garcia has signed with the University of Connecticut.



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