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**CHICAGO RIVER SWIM MAKES HISTORIC RETURN AFTER NEARLY A CENTURY**  
**Raises \$150,000 to support ALS research and youth swim education**

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Chicago, IL — The Chicago River Swim returned on Sunday, September 21, for the first time in 98 years, marking a historic milestone for the city and drawing thousands of swimmers, civic leaders and spectators to the heart of downtown.

The event, produced by the nonprofit A Long Swim, celebrated decades of environmental progress while raising \$150,000 for ALS research at the Ozdinler Lab of Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine and swim-safety education programs at the Salvation Army Kroc Center.

263 swimmers entered the one- and two-mile courses along the main branch of the river, cheered on by crowds lining the Riverwalk.

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson provided opening remarks and said, "The Chicago River Swim is a symbol of Chicago's resilience and progress. Once too polluted for recreation, the river has been restored as one of our city's greatest assets. Today shows how far we've come in reclaiming our environment for future generations."

The Mayor was joined onstage by Olympian and USA Swimming Ambassador Natalie Hinds, who highlighted the importance of water safety, access and opportunity for young swimmers.

A Long Swim co-founder Doug McConnell, who lost both his father and sister to ALS, underscored the dual mission of the Swim: "This is more than just a race, it's a tribute to the river's revival and a commitment to funding research and education that changes lives." Since its founding, A Long Swim has raised more than \$3 million for ALS research.

The event drew strong support from civic leaders, including Congressman Mike Quigley, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Illinois State Senator Mattie Hunter, State Representative Kimberly du Buclet and Alderman Ronnie Mosely, who were in attendance.

Olympian Olivia Smoliga, a Chicago-area native who earned gold in Rio 2016 and bronze in Tokyo 2020 and is the founder of In Depth Swim Academy, took first in the women's one-mile race with a time of 22:45. Levy Nathan won the men's division in 22:22. In the two-mile competition, Becca Mann captured the women's title in 40:07, while Isaac Eilmes led the men's field in 40:13. Their achievements highlighted both the athletic rigor of the event and the river's transformation into safe, swimmable waters.

The Swim highlighted the river's dramatic transformation into one of Chicago's greatest civic assets. The Chicago River is now at its cleanest levels on record, supporting more than 80 species of fish and a growing diversity of wildlife. This transformation reflects decades of environmental progress, including: stronger federal and local regulations, advanced wastewater treatment by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD), the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan to reduce overflows, advocacy and cleanups by Friends of the Chicago River and ecological recovery efforts led by the Shedd Aquarium. Together, these partners have helped reclaim the river as a living ecosystem and made it possible for swimmers to safely return for the first time in nearly a century.

Swimmer safety was paramount. The course was safeguarded by more than 100 trained personnel, including lifeguards and observers in kayaks, on support boats and on shore.

Research-based water testing was critical to making the Chicago River Swim possible. The University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), which also conducted daily summer testing of city beaches for the Chicago Park District, led the testing along the course. Over 19 days, UIC regularly collected samples at eight bridges, with every result well within EPA guidelines.

All tests returned in the "green flag" range, confirming suitable conditions for swimmers. To strengthen safeguards, the Swim implemented a layered approach, combining UIC's testing with oversight by MWRD. More info [here](#).

"Our partnership with the Chicago River Swim benefited the athletes who participated and our students, whose commitment to water quality helps make Chicago a leader in testing public waterways," said Abhilasha Shrestha, Research Assistant Professor at the UIC School of Public Health. "It's rewarding to see science play a meaningful role in providing a safe experience for the swimmers."

For more information, visit: [www.chicagoriverswim.org](http://www.chicagoriverswim.org)

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## **ABOUT THE CHICAGO RIVER SWIM**

The Chicago River Swim (CRS) is a charitable event produced by A Long Swim, a nonprofit that raises funds for ALS research through open-water and marathon swimming events. Inspired by urban swims in cities such as New York, Amsterdam and Paris, CRS is designed to transform perceptions of the Chicago River while positioning Chicago as a global leader in environmental progress.

## **ABOUT A LONG SWIM**

A Long Swim is a nonprofit that designs and manages open water swimming events to raise funds for ALS research. Founded by siblings Doug McConnell and Ellen McConnell Blakeman after their father passed away from ALS, and Ellen was later diagnosed with the disease, the organization has raised more than \$3 million for ALS research at Ozdinler Lab of Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. Doug, a world-class marathon swimmer, has conquered some of the most challenging waters in the world, including the English Channel, Manhattan Island, the Catalina Channel and the Molokai Channel, using his skills to fundraise for the fight against ALS.