

# Spinal cord injury inspires fund-raising swim



Mark Bender, with his family, wants those with spinal cord injuries to live full lives. Photo/Provided

**By Kathryn Reed**

*“When we meet real tragedy in life, we can react in two ways – either by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits, or by using the challenge to find our inner strength.” – Dalai Lama*

Mark Bender chose to find his inner strength when his life was turned upside down three years ago. While body surfing in Hawaii a wave threw him to the ocean’s floor. He is now a quadriplegic.

Out of the tragedy he started a nonprofit called Finding HUP. The goal is to help others like him get back into “the mix” – as in doing some of the things they could do when they were able bodied.



Ric Llewellyn

Part of the inspiration for the nonprofit came from hitting roadblocks with not finding equipment to do the things he wanted to do. He knew he couldn't be alone.

Finding HUP's name comes from the cycling world where the crowd yells "hup, hup" to cyclists passing by. Bender used to be a competitive cyclist. He has learned to use a hand bike.

Bender's friend Ric Llewellyn, a former South Lake Tahoe resident and brother of longtime local Randy Llewellyn, is on a quest to raise money for Finding HUP.

"Finding HUP is about helping others, getting back into some sort of athletic endeavor," Llewellyn told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Promoting adaptive athletics, proving scholarships, equipment and resources to go to camps for people who are paralyzed is what Finding HUP is about.

Llewellyn on Aug. 24 plans to swim from Emerald Bay to Nevada Beach as a fundraiser for the charity. This is 8½ miles.

"The rules for marathon swimming is that it has to be a minimum distance and you have to do it without a wetsuit," Llewellyn explained. "I want it to be a legit marathon swim."

The goal is to raise awareness about the foundation as well as money for it. Bringing attention to spinal cord injuries in general is also part of the plan.

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## Notes:

- To donate, go **online**.
- More info about Washington-based Finding HUP is **online**.