

# New direction for new director

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*Triathlon Santa Cruz  
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Standing on Main Beach at the start of her first triathlon in 2009, Jennifer Squires got an inkling of how many proverbial hats a race director must wear.

As the crime reporter for the Santa Cruz Sentinel, she had witnessed her share of gory scenes, and as the waves crashed on the shore, she had a sinking feeling she was about to become part of one. That's about when Rich Larson, the Santa Cruz Triathlon race director and a friend of Squires, stopped by to offer a few words of encouragement and a friendly pat on the shoulder.

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ANTHONY L. SOLIS — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL FILE

Incoming Santa Cruz Triathlon race director Jennifer Squires is comforted by outgoing race director Rich Larson prior to her first triathlon on Sept. 20, 2009.

## IF YOU GO

SANTA CRUZ TRIATHLON

**When:** Sunday, 8 a.m.

**Where:** Depot Park, Santa Cruz

**What:** 1.5K swim, 40K bike, 10K run

**Details:** santacruztriathlon.org

## Triathlon

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Five years later, Squires will be the one doing whatever she can to help about 800 racers sail safely through Sunday's 1.5-kilometer swim, 40k bike and 10k run when she oversees her first Santa Cruz Triathlon as race director.

"I think there's a picture of me looking really nervous before the swim," Squires said Wednesday while driving a car crammed with water bottles, Hammer Gel, beach balls and race T-shirts to Sunnyvale for the first of two race-packet pickup sessions. "Rich is there in his race director's outfit trying to comfort me as I'm looking terrified in my wetsuit."

Squires got over her nerves and finished that race. She went on to compete in one more full Santa Cruz Triathlon and two relays. Her experience on the course as well as behind the scenes — she has filled various volunteer roles with the race over the past five years, including assistant race director — gave her some ideas for changes she

wanted to make when the board of directors put her in charge.

Foremost among them was to move the bike course onto West Cliff Drive.

Traditionally the start of the course took racers down Delaware Avenue to Natural Bridges Drive, where they would jog onto Western Avenue before heading north on Highway 1 to the Davenport turnaround. However, several changes during Larson's tenure, including the loss of the road into Longs Marine Lab after a fog-delayed race impacted its visitors, left the course slightly shy of its advertised 40k length.

"We added a dog leg and that got us up to 38.9(k), but we really wanted to get it back up to 40," said Squires, 33, now a senior account manager at Miller Maxfield Inc. "We considered different ways of adding on ... and one of the safest ways was to go along West Cliff."

It also has the benefit of being one of the most scenic options. Plus, it gives spectators the luxury of watching both bikers and runners, who have always traversed West Cliff, from the same vantage point.

In addition to altering

the bike course, Squires in her first year has overseen the addition of an elective Open division for racers expecting to be among the event's most competitive and has made the race more social-media friendly.

"Just watching her work with the race over the years, she totally gets it," said Larson, who stepped aside in part so he could return to racing, which he will be doing Sunday. "Working with race administration, working with the athletes, she's good in the community and with the police and others. That's a real big plus for us. And her smile is nice, too."

Despite the changes she has implemented, Squires said what attracted her to the race originally is something that has been at its foundation since the beginning. Since it was first moved from the Eastside to the Main Beach area 32 years ago, proceeds from the nonprofit race have gone back to athletic programs in the community. She said this year about 15 groups will benefit from the race, including high school and college sports teams, the Santa Cruz County Track Club and the Santa Cruz Triathlon Club. The

groups earn the race's donation by volunteering during race setup and preparation and on race day.

Their efforts and their causes strike a chord with Squires, who began running with Oregon's Track City Track Club when she was 7. When her parents later started their own track club, she and her brother and sister became mini managers. So, she also knows how much donations can help.

Now that race day is here, though, Squires said she's feeling the weight of three decades of tradition. In her first year as director, she's learned it's tough, perhaps even impossible, to give all the racers what they want — even if it's just a word of encouragement and a friendly pat on the shoulder.

"I realize the hardest part is the history," she said. "This race means a lot of things to a lot of people. It's a huge responsibility to take charge of it and deliver a good event. I feel like a lot of people are watching."

"People definitely have expectations, and you don't want to screw it up."

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