

Richmond Looks to Make a Splash with the Virginia Commonwealth Games Swim Meet at NOVA Aquatics Center

The Commonwealth Games swimming is heading east, and organizers say the Richmond region is ready.

On June 11-14, swimmers from across Virginia will converge on the Regency Aquatic Center for the annual swimming competition of the Games. The meet will be hosted by NOVA of Virginia Aquatics, one of the state's largest and most experienced swim organizations, with Drew Hirth coordinating operations at the facility.

The move to Richmond brings the Games closer to areas of Virginia where swimming attracts hundreds: expanding access, increasing participation, and showcasing the region's growing sports infrastructure.

"This is really about exposure," Hirth said. "The Richmond metro area is more than 1.6 million people. Bringing the Games here puts them in front of more families, more athletes, and more communities."

Hirth is director of operations for NOVA of Virginia Aquatics, which operates two aquatic centers in Richmond's West End. The Commonwealth Games meet will be held at NOVA's Regency Aquatic Center, a 50-meter competition facility that has served as the organization's primary meet venue for the past four years.

NOVA hosts between 30 and nearly 40 swim meets each year, ranging from USA Swimming club competitions to high school meets for Henrico County. That experience, Hirth said, makes the organization well-positioned to manage the scale and logistics of a statewide event like the Commonwealth Games.

"You can't run a USA Swimming meet without officials and volunteers," he said. "That's the backbone of everything we do."

For the Commonwealth Games, NOVA expects to have 40 to 60 volunteers on the pool deck at any given time, along with certified officials required for sanctioned competition. Many of those volunteers will come from NOVA's own families, who routinely support meets on weekends and weekdays throughout the year.

The Regency Aquatic Center itself is part of what made Richmond an attractive host. The facility is a renovation of a former two-story Macy's department store — an adaptive reuse project completed in phases. The first phase, which opened in 2021, included the 50-meter competition pool, warm-up pools, and support spaces. The second phase, completed in 2025, added second-floor spectator seating for 800, with total capacity exceeding 1,000.



"It's a really cool adaptive reuse of an old department store that's now serving the community," Hirth said.

Henrico County played a key role in making the project possible, part of a broader investment in sports and recreation facilities across the region. Hirth, a lifelong Henrico County resident, said those investments benefit both residents and visiting athletes.

"Sports tourism is a major driver of local economic activity," Hirth said.

His connection to the Games goes back decades. As a swimmer in the mid-1990s, he competed in the Games when events were held farther west, including at outdoor pools in Radford and Waynesboro.

"It was always a good opportunity to swim long course," he said, referring to the 50-meter format used in Olympic competition. "Being outdoors in the summer, swimming in parks — those are really good memories."

Those early experiences eventually led to a career in the sport. Hirth attended Virginia Tech in the early 2000s and briefly swam there before beginning what has become nearly 20 years as a full-time employee with NOVA.

"I started with NOVA shortly after that, and I haven't looked back since," he said. Now, he finds himself helping bring the Games to a new audience, one that includes more swimmers who can compete without traveling across the state.

"Geographically, this puts the meet within reach for more athletes," Hirth said. "For NOVA, it's a home meet. But for the Games, it's an opportunity to grow."

While Hirth's focus is on swimming, he said the broader impact of hosting events across the Richmond metro area could benefit all Commonwealth Games sports.

"I hope that exposure spills over," he said. "That's how these events stay strong."

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