

Making a Splash

Rita Goldberg turned her lifelong passion for the pool into a thriving business that's teaching kids how to swim safely. // BY LOCKE HUGHES //



Rita Goldberg, 62,
Sunrise, FL

HER BUSINESS
British Swim School,
with locations
in FL, MD and IL

THE CONCEPT
Schools that teach
skills plus safety

EARNINGS
\$2.2 million in sales
last year

rather than swimming for sport, parents flocked to Rita's school.

→ FIND EXISTING RESOURCES.

"I realized there are pools at health clubs, hotels and rental developments that sit empty all day," Rita says. "So I decided to rent that space to save the cost of building pools as I expanded the company."

→ KEEP A "MOM-AND-POP" FEEL.

Rita ensures that each of the 13 British Swim School locations has a welcoming staff and personal touches to make nervous students—and parents—feel comfortable. All teachers are expected to know students' names, and they are well-versed in reassuring uneasy children. "They gear their teaching to each child's personality—we don't have a cookie-cutter approach," says Rita. Plus, students who pass an ability level have their photo taken with a specially colored swim cap, so they can share their achievement with friends and family. "It's the attention to detail that keeps people coming back," says Rita.

→ **BUILD A STRONG TEAM.** When Rita founded the company, she handled both the teaching and the business side by herself. But as British Swim School expanded, she found herself spending less time in the pool and more hours in the office. "I soon realized my true passion was working with students, not handling finances, so I brought on a business manager to take care of the financial side," says Rita. "It's important to know which facet you want to focus on, then find people who specialize in other areas. You're made by the people you employ." ✱

Her Success Secrets

→ **DO WHAT YOU LOVE.** Rita swam competitively in Britain until she was a teen, but it didn't cross her mind to turn her hobby into a career until years later. "One day I accompanied a friend to her child's swim lesson, and as soon as I saw the coach interacting with the kids, I knew that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life," Rita remembers. She quit her teaching job and opened her own swim school. "Each day I go to work excited to help my students learn skills they'll always have," she says.

→ **FILL A NEED.** "When I started teaching 25 years ago, kids were taught to swim at age 5 or 6," says Rita. "But I wanted younger children to develop swimming skills, too, which could save their life in an emergency." After researching various methods, Rita developed a unique program that teaches children as young as 1 how to float on their backs first (rather than swim facedown). "When I tested this method, even the littlest ones could float on their backs," recalls Rita. Since the focus was on safety first

Colored caps signify students' progress: The little girl in red can swim on her own