



## FORMER SWIMMER FINDS FREEDOM

PHOTO BY ADRIAN ETHERIDGE

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Alexandra van Dorsten used to dream about swimming.

"We don't have enough people for this relay! You have to jump in and save the day!"

She wakes up. She did not get to swim the relay.

"I had so many dreams about swimming after I left," van Dorsten said. "I had so many dreams that I was back on the team."

Van Dorsten, a 22-year-old UNC Asheville graduate, swam competitively for almost 10 years. She started swimming in the 7th grade, and did not plan to swim in college until she fell in love with UNCA's team.

"It's really cool to have a group of people that you just automatically have to be friends with coming into college," van Dorsten said. "Coach Elizabeth was kind of like my mom when I first got here and it was nice to have that support and the routine, too. Because otherwise I would've been really lost."

UNCA Head Swim Coach Elizabeth Lykins started the swim program from scratch in 2012. She said she recruited van Dorsten to swim on the team.

"I rely a lot on my current team to give feedback," Lykins said. "When they visit, they stay the night, they stay overnight, they go to meals, they hang out, they socialize, they go to the cafeteria. They do all those things with the team. And, just kind

of like making friends, you decide if that's going to be a good fit for you or not."

The recruiting process included inviting potential swimmers to visit the campus, meet the team and decide if they would be a good fit for the program. Lykins said recruiting an athlete feels kind of like conducting a job interview.

Van Dorsten said she planned on attending UNC Chapel Hill until she changed her mind last minute and decided she wanted to swim. She was the latest commit the UNCA team has ever had.

"Alexandra's a very smart young lady," Lykins said. "I knew she would do well at the academic level here, which is also a very important part of our recruiting process. We

want to ensure that we're getting people who can also be academically successful. We don't want to bring in swimmers just because they're great swimmers if there's no way they can be successful at our university."

Janet R. Cone, the athletics director at UNCA since 2004, said being a student athlete means more than being a champion in athletics.

"The things that are important to you, you'll find time to do them," Cone said. "So student athletes know because of what we value in athletics, that academics is first. You've gotta prioritize your academics first or you don't get to play. And second, we want them to be the best student athletes and we know that's two things. Student and