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BBC'S NOLAN HELPS MAKES A SPLASH IN EAST BELFAST

BBC star Stephen Nolan has helped an East Belfast swimming club make a splash - by launching a 25-hour charity Swimathon.

He was joined by former Lord Mayor of Belfast Jim Rodgers in backing the event, which aims to raise £25,000 to help fund research into asthma.

Templemore Amateur Swimming Club (TASC) is based at the oldest pool in Ireland on the city's Templemore Avenue – and this year celebrates its 25th anniversary.

To mark its special birthday, the club has launched a marathon swimming extravaganza which will take place over the 1st and 2nd November.

They plan to keep at least one swimmer in the pool from 5pm on Saturday to 6pm the following day.

Gary Proctor, chairman of the club said: "Templemore ASC has almost 300 members aged between three and 23 – some learning how to swim and others swimming competitively for the Club.

"In Northern Ireland, 35,000 children suffer from asthma and 15 of our own swimmers have the condition. A number of them seem to experience reduced symptoms after swimming.

"We are talking to Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke about how we can commission research into the possible benefits of swimming on asthma. We want to do this - not just to benefit ourselves, but to put something back into the wider community.

"As this is our silver anniversary, we decided to go for a ***25 hour*** Swimathon. The event is open to everyone and we are asking other swimming clubs, as

well as friends, family, Club members and local businesses to get involved, get fit and get sponsored for 25 yards, 25 lengths or for 25 minutes!

“We need to raise £8 for every minute of the Swimathon to realise our ambitious target of £25,000.

“A few weeks ago I heard Councillor Rodgers challenging Stephen on-air to a swim. We felt that the two were a perfect fit to launch our Swimathon.

“We would be delighted to facilitate a swim-off between them and are hoping that both men will encourage others to go online to www.justgiving.com/tasc and make a donation.

“Anyone interested in finding out more should log on to the Latest News section of the Club website www.templemore.org.uk . For more information on the work of Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke go to www.nichsa.com “

Councillor Rodgers said: “I’m delighted to be able to lend my support to such a worthy cause. It is so important to encourage everyone to keep active and keep fit and to make such a contribution in the process is excellent.”

BBC presenter Stephen Nolan said: “The Templemore Club deserves praise for choosing to mark their anniversary with an event like this. I hope it will be the biggest fundraiser in the country!”

Tracy McAfee, Director of Fundraising with NI Chest, Heart and Stroke, said: “One in seven children will suffer from asthma at some point in their lives, so it’s a hugely important area of research. We have already directed £100,000 of funding to it in 2008, and the efforts of the swimmers will ensure that we can commit many more thousands in the coming year. In many cases, children with asthma find it difficult to take any form of exercise – but swimming is often the exception.”