



## **Olympic Gold Medalist-Endorsed *Stewie the Duck Swim School* Opens for Lessons in Norwalk on June 5**

### ***Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation's Tips for a Safer Summer at the Pool and Beach***

**Norwalk, Conn. – May 15, 2023** – Just as backyard pools and local beaches open for the season, Kim and Stew Leonard, Jr. will realize a lifelong dream with the opening of the Stewie the Duck Swim School on June 5. The new 6,400 square foot state-of-the-art aquatics facility, located at 55 Westport Ave. in Norwalk, will operate under the mission of “Saving lives, One Lesson at a Time.” All proceeds from the Stewie the Duck Swim School will be donated to the Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation to help fund swimming lessons for children in need as well as lifeguard training at its partner organizations throughout the country.

The Stewie the Duck Swim School has attracted the attention of three-time Olympic gold medalist swimmer Rowdy Gaines. “Stew, Kim, and I share a common belief that teaching children how to float on their back is the number one way to help prevent accidental drownings,” noted Gaines, who also serves as a board member for the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance’s Step Into Swim water safety program. “It just takes a few swim lessons to learn this life-saving skill. The Stewie the Duck Swim School is an incredible endeavor that has the potential to save thousands of lives.”

The swimming school and the Foundation were founded in memory of the Leonards’ 21-month-old son, Stewie, who tragically died in a drowning accident in 1989. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drowning is the leading cause of accidental injury death in children aged 1-4 and children who take swim lessons are 88% less likely to drown than children who do not. Since its inception in 1990, the Foundation has raised \$6 million for water safety awareness, providing swim lessons to children in need as well as lifeguard training.

“Getting your kids into swimming lessons this summer, plus a commitment to watching them around the water, are two great ways to start the summer off safely,” said Kim and Stew Leonard Jr., co-founders, Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation. “Until swimming lessons are a part of every child’s school curriculum, it is up to parents and caregivers to make water safety a priority in their own homes and whenever they’re spending time around the water.”

Children need layers of protection around the water – including barriers (e.g., pool covers and fences), life jackets, adult supervision, and of course, swimming lessons. The Leonards recommend three ways that families can help lower the risk of a child drowning this summer:

#### **1. LEARN to Swim**

The American Red Cross estimates that nearly all parents (94%) expect that their children will engage in some sort of water activity. However, nearly 61% of these parents report that their child cannot demonstrate all five basic skills that could save their lives in the water. While swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning in children, the Leonards also recommend children wearing a U.S. Coast Guard Approved life jacket whenever they are near a body of water.

Notably, each of the 40+ instructors and lifeguards at the Stewie the Duck Swim School are American Red Cross certified in Lifeguard Training as well as certified as an WSI™ (Water Safety Instructor). Students will progress through an American Red Cross curriculum designed for Stewie the Duck Swim School, focusing on water safety and learning to swim.

## **2. TALK About Water Safety**

Stew and Kim urge caregivers to talk directly to their young children about not going near the water without first asking for permission. To help facilitate these conversations, Stew and Kim are the authors of both the ***Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim*** book, written for children ages three and up, and the ***Swim Time with Stewie the Duck*** board book, which is geared towards children under the age of three. Using bright, bold colors and easy to understand language, Stewie guides children through his three water safety rules, ending with his signature *Don't Jump In Til You Learn to Swim* song, set to the tune of the classic *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. Both books are available for purchase at all Stew Leonard's locations and online at [www.StewLeonardsGifts.com](http://www.StewLeonardsGifts.com). The ***Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim*** mobile book app can also be downloaded for free through Amazon, Google Play, and iTunes. All book sale proceeds benefit Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation.

***Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim*** is a proven water safety awareness tool. It is used to support drowning prevention and water safety programs by fire departments, children's hospitals, municipalities, schools, and police stations throughout the nation, especially in parts of our country where swimming pools never close for the winter. For example, in Rialto, California, the Rialto Fire Department forged a drowning prevention partnership in 2007 with Rialto Unified School District; the fire department visits first grade classrooms throughout 19 elementary schools to discuss water safety. An average of 20,000 first graders are exposed to Stewie the Duck's message of "don't jump in 'til you learn to swim" every May and the program's success has been remarkable. "Since we began a more than a decade ago, no child going through this program has drowned," notes Matt Payne, the Rialto firefighter paramedic who spearheads the drowning prevention program.

## **3. DESIGNATE a Water Watcher**

Nine out of 10 drownings occur when a caregiver is supervising but not paying attention. However, drowning is preventable when one adult commits to being a water watcher and never leaving children unattended. The water watcher should be an experienced swimmer, should refrain from using their phone, and be within arm's length of young children or inexperienced swimmers. Adults can take turns being the water watcher, however they must not leave the water area without first finding an adult to replace them.

For additional information on Stewie the Duck products, Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation and Stew Leonard's group of farm fresh food stores, please contact:  
Meghan Bell / [Mbell@stewleonards.com](mailto:Mbell@stewleonards.com) / 203.750.6107

*Parents: please contact Stewie the Duck Swim School directly at 203.750.6100 or [info@stewietheduck.org](mailto:info@stewietheduck.org) to register your children for swim lessons.*

*Follow Stewie the Duck on Facebook.com/StewLeonardIIIWaterSafetyFoundation, Twitter.com/StewieTheDuck, and Instagram.com/StewieTheDuck*

**About Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation**

On January 1, 1989, a 21-month old toddler lost his life in a drowning accident. This sparked his parents to pledge that they would do everything in their power to prevent this tragedy from striking other families, since drowning is the leading cause of accidental death in children under five. In 1990, that toddler's parents, Kim and Stew Leonard, founded the Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation in memory of their son. Since this time, the Foundation has raised more than \$6 million dollars to go towards water safety awareness and education, including providing swim scholarships and lifeguard training, along with writing and publishing two children's books on water safety and a mobile game and free water safety app available on iTunes, Amazon Kindle HD and Google Play. For more information, please visit [www.stewietheduck.org](http://www.stewietheduck.org).

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