



**OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST CULLEN JONES AND USA SWIMMING FOUNDATION TO VISIT SHREVEPORT, LA ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10 TO HELP DEVELOP LIFE SAVING LEARN TO SWIM PROGRAMS IN THE REGION**

***Jones to address parents and children on the drowning crisis in the African American and Latino communities and what can be done to prevent future tragedies***

**Colorado Springs, CO, November 2, 2010** – Following the tragic drowning deaths of six teenagers this summer in Shreveport, LA, Gold Medalist Cullen Jones and the USA Swimming Foundation will visit the community on Wednesday, November 10 to advocate for water safety education, raise awareness about the importance of learning to swim, and help develop life-saving learn to swim programs in the region. Jones, who almost drowned at the age of 5, is a passionate advocate for drowning prevention and has been working to raise awareness and funds on behalf of the USA Swimming Foundation for two years as part of a nationwide water safety campaign, “Make a Splash with Cullen Jones.” Sponsored by ConocoPhillips, “Make a Splash with Cullen Jones” works to educate children, families and community leaders on the importance of learning to swim. In addition, Make a Splash, through nearly 300 local partner programs, offers free or low cost swimming lessons in hundreds of cities across the country.

In Shreveport, Cullen will talk with the local community about the summer’s tragedy, why drowning continues to affect African American and Hispanic families at alarming rates, offer information about life-saving learn to swim programs, tell his personal story of near-drowning and what it took for him to later become an Olympic champion. He will also speak directly to hundreds of children at a youth assembly and then give a swim lesson as part of the team’s efforts to shine a light on water safety.

“To keep kids safe next summer, we have to start now,” says Jones. “What happened here in August will always be a tragic reminder of what’s at risk when kids can’t swim. By educating parents, talking about the issues that have traditionally prevented kids from learning and giving them the resources they need to get their kids in swim lessons, we can stop these senseless deaths.”

Drowning continues to be a major problem in the U.S, especially among minority youth. According to a recent study\* by the USA Swimming Foundation and the University of Memphis, 70% (seven out of ten) of African American children and 58% of Hispanic children report low to no swimming ability, putting them at an increased risk of drowning. The number one factor preventing children from learning to swim was reported as fear, followed by lack of parental encouragement. Cullen is committed to talking about these issues and helping families understand the life-or-death importance of learning to swim.

As a result of Cullen’s efforts, along with the USA Swimming Foundation and ConocoPhillips, Make a Splash has grown significantly since its inception in 2007. So far, there have been 563,000 enrollments in lessons at 285 Make a Splash local partner programs in 43 states. In addition, nearly 22,500 children have received lessons thanks to scholarships. The USA Swimming Foundation was also able to present \$50,000 in total grant dollars to a variety of swim programs in 2009 and \$100,000 in total grant dollars in 2010.

“Make a Splash with Cullen Jones” will make its last stop this year in New York on Friday, November 19.

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#### **About Cullen Jones**

Cullen Jones is one of the fastest freestyle sprinters in the world today and currently holds the American record in the 50 freestyle. At the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, he was a member of the electrifying 400m freestyle relay team that broke the world record and won Olympic gold in one of the most memorable races in history. With the victory, Cullen became the second African-American to win Olympic swimming gold. He is currently training for the 2012 Olympic Games and trains under Coach David Marsh at SwimMAC in Charlotte, North Carolina.

#### **About Make a Splash**

Make a Splash is a national child-focused anti-drowning initiative created by The USA Swimming Foundation, which operates by aligning the nation's top learn-to-swim resources in an effort to save lives. Make a Splash educates parents through a national awareness campaign, saves lives by joining forces with grassroots learn-to-swim programs and reaches thousands of children across the country. The program exists because nine people drown each day in the U.S., and in ethnically-diverse communities the youth drowning rate is 2-3 times higher. For more information, visit [makeasplash.org](http://makeasplash.org).

#### **About the USA Swimming Foundation**

The USA Swimming Foundation was established in 2004 with the purpose of using the sport of swimming to improve lives and make communities stronger. The Foundation focuses its resources in three main areas: making children safer in and around the water to reduce drowning; encouraging diversity in the sport of swimming; and using swimming to promote a healthy lifestyle to combat issues such as childhood obesity. The USA Swimming Foundation is the premier charitable organization that supports the sport of swimming in the United States from grassroots to gold medals and is recognized as a national leadership organization for promoting water safety. It is the Foundation's ongoing goal to teach every child in America how to swim. To help, to donate or for information: [www.swimfoundation.org](http://www.swimfoundation.org).

#### **\* To review the complete study and its findings please visit:**

[http://www.usaswimming.org/\\_Rainbow/Documents/121d4497-c4be-44a6-8b28-12bf64f36036/2010 Swim Report-USA Swimming-5-26-10.pdf](http://www.usaswimming.org/_Rainbow/Documents/121d4497-c4be-44a6-8b28-12bf64f36036/2010 Swim Report-USA Swimming-5-26-10.pdf)

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