



From Colleen Ferguson

TOP AND RIGHT: Kwaj residents Giordan Harris, Ann-Marie Hepler and Colleen Ferguson join Majuro resident Mattie Sasser and coach Amy LaCost for a photo during the 2015 Pacific Games in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Ann-Marie Hepler competes in the Long Course World Championships in Kazan, Russia.

KWAJ ATHLETES REP RMI ABROAD

BY COLLEEN FERGUSON

Representatives for the Republic of the Marshall Islands came together on the world stage this past summer. Competing on behalf of their host country, Giordan Harris, Ann-Marie Hepler and Colleen Ferguson participated in the 2015 Pacific Games in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea and the 2015 Long Course World Championships in Kazan, Russia.

Coached by Amy LaCost, team Marshall Islands made it to the finals every night during the six days of competitive swimming held during this year's Pacific Games in July. Harris, Hepler and Ferguson each competed in more than five events, a demanding schedule that was a challenge for the athletes.

"Six days of swimming was definitely longer than I'm used to doing," Hepler said. "Although it was difficult, it was lots of fun."

Competing for the Marshall Islands in weight lifting was Majuro resident Mattie Sasser. She took four bronze, one gold and a trophy for junior weightlifting. Sasser proudly waved the R.M.I. flag during closing ceremonies.

This year's Long Course World Championships in Kazan brought out Team Marshall Islands to compete on the international stage against some of the best athletes in the world. Held

July 28-Aug. 11, it was the team's second major international competition for the year.

Harris competed in the 100 meter freestyle and the 50 meter freestyle, achieving a time of 57.75 seconds in the former and a time of 26.18 seconds in the latter. Hepler finished the 50 meter freestyle with a time of 28.52 seconds and completed the 50 meter butterfly with the time of 30.02 seconds. Ferguson completed the 100 meter freestyle with the time of 1.05 seconds and did the 50 meter backstroke with the time of 33.04 seconds.

For Harris, the trip to Kazan to represent the Marshall Islands on the global stage was both an honor and an enriching personal experience.

"Every game they just seem

to step it up in some way. It just keeps getting better and better," Harris said. "I love the Athletes' Village; I love the environment, and it's great to be with all the athletes in the same place. I'm riding the bus and eating with the world's top swimmers when normally I'd just see them on YouTube. Absolutely happy, that's all I could ask for out here halfway across the world."

Long Course World Championships are held every two years. Over 180 countries participated in the 2015 World Championships. The only sports that are played are water sports, which are swimming, open water swimming, diving, high diving, water polo and synchronized swimming. The next World Championships will be held in Budapest, Hungary in 2017.