

This month I'd like to highlight a Clearwater mermaid who lives right off Drew St. That's right, a mermaid! Whitney Swinford is a talented entertainer who can be contracted (hired) to perform, in water or out, as a beautiful mermaid.

## **Q & A:**

**Hello Whitney, thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview to let my readers know a little more about "all things mermaid."**

**Let's start with a few background questions and then we can get into the "fun" of learning more about your beautiful tail, and how long you can hold your breath.**

### **Are you a Clearwater native?**

I am originally from Texas but moved to Florida in 2017 and found my way to beautiful Clearwater in 2019 when we bought a home here.

### **What's your education background or work history, that is, how does one develop an interest or skills in mermaid performance?**

I have a bachelor's degree in biology but have always been passionate in performing. I was in choir all throughout my school years right through college as well. I was actually a vocal major my freshman year in college. Performing has always been a part of my life so it was an easy transition.

### **How long have you been performing as a mermaid?**

I put on my first tail in 2018 and officially formed my company and started mermaiding professionally in 2023.

### **Is this a full-time job?**

Right now, it's a successful side business. My "human" job is a licensed health insurance agent.

### **Can you tell us all about your beautiful tail?**

I have several tails, but my first custom silicone tail is my favorite and will always have a special place in my heart.

### **Who designs or constructs it?**

It was designed and commissioned by MerNation, a local company out of St. Petersburg, FL.

### **How much does it weigh?**

About 30-35 pounds

How does it stay on your body?

It has a monofin that my feet go into that the tail mold is fit around during the construction process. This monofin also provides the propulsion needed to swim in the water. This tail is custom fit to my measurements so just slides up like pants and fits snugly to my body.

### **Is it easy to put on and take off?**

Yes and no. It requires that I use a lubricant like a water-based lube or conditioner to help slide it up my legs to where it will be worn. The hardest part is making sure my feet are securely in the monofin for comfort and most importantly, safety. Putting it on, on a good day takes about 10 minutes, taking it off, much less. It's a process but definitely worth it in the end!

### **How many tails do you have?**

I currently have 1 silicone and 4 fabric tails. Excited to be adding a new silicone to my collection shortly from an incredible artist out of Miami so stay tuned to my social media accounts for updates!

### **Are there different sizes?**

Yes! For silicone tails, they are custom made for each mermaid's specific measurements so they are extremely customizable. For fabric tails, they are offered in typical clothing sizes (S, M, L, XL, etc). Fabric tails are awesome because you only need the monofin to swim in and you can choose from a large variety of tail "skins" to go over it so the potential looks are endless! For fabric tails, I prefer "Mertailor" in Lecanto, FL. He has a shop there with an aquarium and mermaid show! Very awesome and highly recommend checking it out! So proud to be able to support local Florida businesses.

### **Do you have a tail for indoor performance? And one for in the water?**

I prefer silicone tails for any events that are very up close and personal, especially events with children involved as they love to feel it and silicone provides the most realistic look and feel in my opinion. For other events, I will typically leave that up to the client. Fabric tails have come a long way though and look just as amazing as silicone!

### **How do you take care of your tail?**

Silicone tails are prone to mold which can destroy a tail so it's very important make sure that the tail is cleaned and thoroughly dried after each use. After a swim, I will fill a bathtub with warm water and dawn dish soap and soak the tail for a couple of hours. I will sponge it down, drain the tub, then transfer her to my custom tail rack where it will hang over a fan for several hours.

### **Do you perform in pools?**

I do a lot of performing in pools, yes! It's Florida so mermaids at a pool party are a perfect addition. I also perform in freshwater as well as saltwater aquariums and tanks both large and small!

### **Mermaids swim under water. You don't use goggles, and you have to hold your breath. How long can you hold your breath, and are your eyes every bothered by being open under water?**

I don't typically use goggles for performing but I do wear them when I'm training, especially in larger bodies of water or new venues that I'm not as

familiar with. Safety is very important with everything I do. To help protect my eyes when I'm not wearing goggles, I will apply eye ointment pre and post swim. I'm always working on my breathhold (I'm pool free dive certified, working on finishing my open water free dive certification). Right now, I'm at a 3 minute static breath hold, and about a 1 and a half minute moving breath hold.

### **What types of things do you do when someone hires you for an event?**

So, it depends on the type of event. I've done events where I tell mermaid stories, paint nails, host a singalong, and apply temporary tattoos. I've also done events where I was hired to be "living decor" where I just swam and looked pretty! It's all up to the imagination of the client!

### **Do you ever perform at the beach or in natural water?**

I have done some mermaid surprises where the child comes down to the beach and finds me already there! I love those!

### **How do you practice your mermaid skills?**

I'm in any body of water as much as I can working on everything from my breath hold to making sure I look elegant and I'm looking as natural as possible. Special shoutout goes to my neighbor Beth, who graciously allows me to use her pool to practice!. I have an underwater mirror that I can set up that I can use to see how I am looking as well which has helped me a lot. I also always have someone with me when I swim for safety as well. I also travel out to our beautiful springs regularly as well to practice and play!

### **If someone wants to learn more, or hire you for an event, how should they reach out to you?**

I recommend contacting me through my website below or email!

[www.mermaidgiselle.com](http://www.mermaidgiselle.com)

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