2020 ANNUAL REPORT
Newport Beach Fire Department
Lifeguard Operations Division
Two thousand twenty was a year of challenges, setbacks, and extraordinary efforts in the face of a pandemic. Beach closures placed our lifeguards at the center of a passionate debate during the pandemic. A swell of community support saved the 2020 Junior Guard program. Record heat and crowds in the fall pushed lifeguard activity to historic highs. As the year closed, our lifeguards helped staff one of the first public COVID-19 vaccination clinics in the county.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, our lifeguards showed themselves to be adaptable, resourceful, and resilient. Our lifeguards staffed our City’s Emergency Operations center for almost two months assisting in operations, planning, support, and logistics. We trained 33 rookies and 200 returning lifeguards by adding classes, reducing class sizes and using online training.

Newport’s beaches became a gathering point under the initial “Stay at Home Order” as other recreational outlets closed or were limited. The conflict between the Stay at Home Order and the desire to be on the beach peaked in late April, captured in one picture (below) -- a crowded beach during a pandemic. The photo set off a debate about beach access and Newport Beach became the focus of national and international press.

When this notoriety led to beach closures, our lifeguards demonstrated safety, service, and professionalism under intense scrutiny and pressure. People, on all sides of the issue, subjected our lifeguards to criticism and outbursts of frustration. Our lifeguards acted with a level of professionalism that reflected well on our department and profession.

As the spring progressed, we were in doubt about the feasibility of running our Junior Lifeguard program. We moved forward with our 37th season, thanks to overwhelming support from our JG families, the City Council, and the City leadership. Our JG staff put together a plan to run the program in three locations with enhanced safety protocols. The program was a success and one of the highlights of the year. We are finalizing plans for a new Junior Lifeguard headquarters, with official approval coming in early 2021.

The summer season started with cool weather and small surf. The exception was the 4th of July Weekend when we had 10-15 ft surf from the south. July 3rd was the busiest day of the summer (see p 5). The expected holiday crowds and an outbreak of COVID-19 among a group of our lifeguards prompted the City leadership to close our beaches for the holiday weekend to align with other OC beach closures.

September and October brought record heat and crowds. The weather, telecommuting, and online schooling fueled summer-like beach crowds past Halloween. These conditions resulted in a 12% increase in lifeguard call volume, compared with our five-year average.

The year ended with our seasonal lifeguard staff providing support for the vaccinations of health care workers, public safety, and the public 65 and older. In 2019, I gave a talk at a Lifeguard seminar, describing the effectiveness of lifeguards in a disaster response, based on the skills they use every day on the beach. Watching lifeguards from across the county working together to support the delivery of over 10,000 vaccinations (so far) is one of the proudest moments of my career.

I admire the level of adaptability, service, and professionalism our lifeguards brought to our community in a year of trials, hurdles, and hardships. While 2020 was a terrible year for many, I am so proud of the efforts and achievements of the Newport Beach Lifeguards and consider myself fortunate to be in their ranks.

Mike Halphide
Chief Lifeguard

Clockwise from top left: A crowded Newport Beach on 4/25/20 (photo courtesy of Orange County Register); A Newport Beach Lifeguard on duty at The Wedge; Artist rendition of the future Newport Jr. Lifeguard Headquarters; Lifeguards from multiple Orange County agencies staff a COVID-19 vaccine distribution site.
## 2020 SPECIAL RECOGNITION

### 2020 Newport Beach Seasonal Lifeguard of the Year
**Hayden Paul**  
Lifeguard II - Balboa  
Rookie Summer: 2012

### 2020 Newport Beach Marine Safety Officer of the Year
**Mike Ure**  
Lifeguard Captain - Training / Jr. Lifeguards  
Rookie Summer: 1986

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Lifeguard of the Year</th>
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</table>
| 2020 | West Newport | Rhodes Rosenthal  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2018 |
| 2020 | Balboa | Bryan Buck  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2012 |
| 2020 | Corona Del Mar | Will Harrington  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020 |
| 2020 | Rescue Boat | Gavin Wright  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2012 |
| 2020 | Jr. Lifeguard | Natalie May  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2013 |
| 2020 | Basic Lifeguard Academy “Top Gun” | Joseph Mannon  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020 |
| 2020 | Rookie | Madie Ambrose  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020 |
| 2020 | Headquarters | Rob Marienthal  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2007 |

### 2020 Basic Lifeguard Academy “Top Gun” Scholarship
**Joseph Mannon**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020

### 2020 Rookie Lifeguard of the Year
**Madie Ambrose**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020

### 2020 Rescue Boat Lifeguard of the Year
**Gavin Wright**  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2012

### 2020 Balboa Lifeguard of the Year
**Bryan Buck**  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2012

### 2020 Jr. Lifeguard Instructor of the Year
**Natalie May**  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2013

### 2020 West Newport Lifeguard of the Year
**Rhodes Rosenthal**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2018

### 2020 Balboa Lifeguard of the Year
**Bryan Buck**  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2012

### 2020 Corona Del Mar Lifeguard of the Year
**Will Harrington**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020

### 2020 Basic Lifeguard Academy “Top Gun” Scholarship
**Joseph Mannon**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020

### 2020 Rookie Lifeguard of the Year
**Madie Ambrose**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020

### 2020 Rescue Boat Lifeguard of the Year
**Gavin Wright**  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2012

### 2020 Balboa Lifeguard of the Year
**Bryan Buck**  
Lifeguard II  
Rookie Summer: 2012

### 2020 Corona Del Mar Lifeguard of the Year
**Will Harrington**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020

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**Madie Ambrose**  
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Rookie Summer: 2020

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**Joseph Mannon**  
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### 2020 Rookie Lifeguard of the Year
**Madie Ambrose**  
Lifeguard I  
Rookie Summer: 2020

### Scholarships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBOLA - Don Burns</td>
<td>Former Lifeguard Instructor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dylan Biggerstaff | Lifeguard I, West Newport  
Rookie Summer: 2017 |
| NBOLA - Al Irwin | Former Lifeguard Captain |
| Caroline Amling | Lifeguard I, Jr. Lifeguard Instructor  
Rookie Summer: 2019 |
| NBOLA - Buddy Belshe | Former Lifeguard Captain |
| Rob Marienthal | Lifeguard II, Headquarters Division  
Rookie Summer: 2007 |
| Lifeguard Management Association | Genesis Navarrete  
Lifeguard I, Balboa  
Rookie Summer: 2010 |
| Brent Ranek - Pay it Forward | Sam Hunter  
Lifeguard I, West Newport  
Rookie Summer: 2007 |
On July 3, 2020, the swell of the season rolled into Newport Beach. A long-period southern-hemisphere swell hit with 10-15 foot waves. A crowd of 85,000 was exceptional for a Friday, in anticipation of the beach closures scheduled for the holiday weekend. Newport lifeguards made 2,700 preventative actions and 101 ocean rescues on the 3rd, but one ocean rescue stood out.

Lifeguard Sean Richards made a rescue, bringing a swimmer through the Balboa pier. After exiting the water, he spotted another swimmer getting swept down the beach by the 10-foot surf. When Sean brought the second swimmer through the pilings, both victim and rescuer ricocheted off the pier. He completed the save, handing off the victim to his back-up lifeguards.

Exhausted by two harrowing rescues and a beating by the surf and pier, Sean collapsed on the beach. He was transported to the hospital and held for observation for several hours. Sean recovered but was battered and bruised for the next few days. Coming so close to the July 6th anniversary of Ben Carlson’s last rescue, we breathed a collective sigh of relief, knowing that we were lucky that this turned out with everyone OK.

The Newport Beach City Council commended Sean for “Courageous actions performed during hazardous ocean conditions that saved two lives.” Sean was also recognized by the California and United States Surf Lifesaving Associations for his heroic act.

As evening fell on the third, the surf continued to build and created flooding on the Balboa peninsula, with waves rolling over the beach and across Balboa Blvd and reaching the bay. The flooding blocked traffic, submerged vehicles, and caused some damage to the Junior Lifeguard headquarters.

The day continued to deliver havoc when lifeguards received a report of a 50-foot sailboat run aground on the peninsula after dark. When lifeguards arrived on the scene, the passengers had safely made it to shore. Lifeguards scrapped their initial plan to rescue the boat after deeming it too dangerous, as waves began breaking over the hull. Within ten minutes of arriving on the scene, the hull cracked. Five minutes later, the boat completely disintegrated in the pounding surf. Several days later, lifeguards aided a salvage company and City Public Works crews in recovering the boat’s mast and keel more than a mile up the beach.

On the following day, Newport’s beaches were officially closed. The crowds and activity were light. As the rest of the summer passed, the Pacific Ocean lived up to its name. There were no other large swells or busy days that came close to July 3.

As a lifeguard, we hear stories of the “big days” and massive swells. When working on one of these epic days, we realize why lifeguards love what we do. It’s the teamwork, skill, danger, and bravery that create lifelong camaraderie among lifeguards. We recognize our higher purpose on those days. We grow to understand and personify the slogan “Lifeguards for Life.”

-Mike Halphide
2020 CONDITIONS & STAFFING

LIFEGUARD COVERAGE

98,338

2020 Total Lifeguard Patrol Hours
Patrol hours are when lifeguards are actively watching the water or capable of responding to an emergency in their assigned division. Excluded are hours for training, meetings, administrative duties and night-time standby.

% of 2020 patrol hours by division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>% of 2020 patrol hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Newport</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balboa</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior Lifeguards</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headquarters Division</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corona Del Mar</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rescue Boats</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
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VISITATION

8,261,050
Estimated 2020 Beach Attendance

WEATHER & OCEAN CONDITIONS

Nighttime Call Out Response
Lifeguards provide 24-hour response in the Newport Beach, and are frequently called out for incidents occurring outside of patrol hours. Lifeguards were called to 87 nighttime emergencies in 2020.

77.3 °F August 21 & 23, 2020: warmest recorded surface water temperature in Newport Beach (records started in 1924).

Water temperature data from Shore Stations Program with current funding provided by the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Division of Boating and Waterways, Award#C1670003. Daily temperature data are collected by the Newport Beach Lifeguards with the City of Newport Beach.
2020 LIFEGUARD ACTIVITY

TOTAL CALLS: 189,033

12% Increase from five-year annual average

May 2020 call volume was 3.5 times the five-year annual average

AQUATIC PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS: 96,290

RESCUES: 3,310

Rescues per Mile
West Newport: 831
Balboa Peninsula: 383
Corona del Mar: 800

2020 activity in each area standardized for size of the beach. West Newport ≈ 2.3 miles, Balboa Peninsula ≈ 3 miles, Corona del Mar ≈ 0.3 miles.
Lifeguard Activity Continued...

MINOR FIRST AID EVENTS: **1,467**

MAJOR MEDICAL AID EVENTS: **259**

ANIMAL WARNINGS: **5,523**

OTHER CALLS FOR SERVICE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Contacts</th>
<th>Code Enforcement</th>
<th>Stingray Incidents</th>
<th>Surfer Warning</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>45,379</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,386</strong></td>
<td><strong>645</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,589</strong></td>
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</table>

Public contacts per mile*:
- West Newport: **16,855**
- Balboa Peninsula: **16,215**
- Corona del Mar: **36,703**

Code enforcements per mile*:
- West Newport: **1,837**
- Balboa Peninsula: **1,163**
- Corona del Mar: **5,073**

Stingray incidents per mile*:
- West Newport: **143**
- Balboa Peninsula: **40**
- Corona del Mar: **447**

Surfer warnings per mile*:
- West Newport: **4,429**
- Balboa Peninsula: **688**
- Corona del Mar: **1,127**

*2020 activity in each area standardized for size of the beach. West Newport ≈ 2.3 miles, Balboa Peninsula ≈ 3 miles, Corona del Mar ≈ 0.3 miles.
## 2020 ACTIVITY & WORK HOURS DATA

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<tr>
<th>Lifeguard Event</th>
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<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
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<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
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### Division

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<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>2020 Lifeguard Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Newport</td>
<td>311 346 487 797 3,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balboa Peninsula</td>
<td>370 322 424 642 2,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Lifeguards</td>
<td>196 174 807 186 164</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headquarters Division</td>
<td>1,083 1,037 1,119 1,150 1,701</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corona del Mar</td>
<td>360 364 392 453 1,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue Boats</td>
<td>342 362 346 372 565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Operations</td>
<td>455 846 2,726 1,726 943</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Monthly Hours Totals | 3,117 3,451 6,301 5,326 10,444 | 21,482 31,999 26,984 11,645 6,902 3,153 2,940 133,744 |
Newport Beach Fire Department
Lifeguard Operations Division

SAFETY
SERVICE
PROFESSIONALISM