

Lifeguard Lou Goes Out In Style

By Shannon Svensen, Cal State San Diego

The Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan show for the first time, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became the second African-American to win the Nobel Peace Prize, and China exploded its first atom bomb. The year was 1964, and while all of this was happening, 16 year old Lou Marquette rode his bicycle to Oceanside beach and became a beach lifeguard. Lou's first hourly wage was \$1.63. When Lou turned 18 in 1966, he tried out for the San Diego Coast State Lifeguards, since they paid the hefty sum of \$2.50 an hour. Thus, Marquette embarked on his 34 year lifeguarding career.

Lou worked as a seasonal tower guard until 1972, when he became a full time permanent lifeguard and peace officer. When he started, he supervised lifeguards on the state beaches from Moonlight Beach in Encinitas down to Black's Beach in San Diego.

"There were only three permanent positions back then," said Marquette, "so we had to cover a lot of territory."

More permanent positions were added, and Lou settled into supervising Torrey Pines State Beach, arguably one of the most beautiful beaches in San Diego county. And sometimes, the most dangerous.

"It's hard to say what my most dramatic rescues were in my career," said Lou, "what stands out in my mind are those busy days at Tower 5, perched at the mouth of the Los Penasquitos Lagoon, features strong rip currents and hordes of tourists in the summer. It is the top tower guard assignment in the district, and Lou has coached and supported them for years.

Denny Stoufer, Lifeguard Supervisor II for San Diego's State Beaches concurs. "It's hard to overestimate the impact that Lou has had on our lifeguard service over the years," said Stoufer.

When it became time to hang 'em up, Lou did it his way. The scene was appropriately the old Ranger Lodge at Torrey Pines State Park. And the motif was old-school rager. There was loud surf-rock music, plenty of Mexican food, kegs of beer and hundreds of lifeguards past and present from all over the state. You could tell the veteran party people – they brought their campers. We're not sure how many partyers climbed the flagpole or what they were or weren't wearing but everyone got home safely, sooner or later. It was a fitting finish to a fine career. Lou Marquette saved hundreds of lives and trained many lifeguards who will continue his legacy of keeping the beach and the ocean safe.