

## **Seal Beach Junior Lifeguards, “At a Glance...”**

**By Jake Howard**

While not the oldest junior lifeguard program on the California coast, Seal Beach Junior Lifeguards are helping raise the performance bar for the new millennium. The main concept behind the program is to provide children between the ages of nine and seventeen with knowledge and respect for the ocean and all its various conditions. Topics covered in the six-week course range from “ocean-proofing” and physical development to lifeguard skills and basic first aid. Competition is also a key teaching tool for all the participants. From the first days of running around as a sandy “C” to the too-cool-for-school Captain’s Corp, every kid that spends any time at all in the Seal Beach Junior Lifeguard Program comes away better because of it.

In 1987 the Lifeguard Department took over the program from the Recreation Department, implementing the curriculum that is in existence today. Mark Lees was the first director to take the reins. Today Mr. Lees is working as a Long Beach Firefighter, but he still finds time during the summer months to come down and lend a hand. After virtually building the program from the ground up, Mr. Lees passed the torch to the future Lifeguard Lieutenant AJ Summers and Coleen Cassidy. They maintained the program and helped solidify the impeccable reputation that it carries today. Upon AJ’s promotion to Lieutenant and Ms. Cassidy’s involvement with law school the pair once again passed the torch. Today Mr. Joe Bailey is taking care of matters. As a collegiate shot putter at UCLA and strength and conditioning coach for the U.S. Water Polo Team (his brother Ryan played in the 2000 Sydney Olympics) Joe commands respect and discipline from students and instructors alike. His program today is like a well-greased machine.

In the past two years, the program has almost doubled in size, accepting everyone who was able to pass the swim test. With such a demand, new instructors have been brought into the program and more equipment has been purchased. A 15 to 1 student to instructor ratio translates into involvement by over half of the Lifeguard Department staff. As the old adage states, “Two heads are better than one.” This very much holds true in the case of the Seal Beach Junior Lifeguards. While rapid expansion has been known to stress-out some programs, Seal Beach’s has only gotten stronger. It started with less than fifty kids and no paddleboards and has grown to a group of more than 225 kids and an entire fleet of paddleboards, surfboards, bodyboards and whatever else that floats. The very structure of the program is changing. The biggest news over the past two years is the implementation of the “Captain’s Corp.” The group is comprised of 15 “A” group students that were qualified to participate. These kids showed strong leadership skills, passed a physical, written and oral exam and a situational test. In the Captain’s Corp, they receive more intensive and specific training. They work as aids with instructors and are exposed to a variety of experiences in the public safety field. It is a program that has been designed to help those kids who are serious about lifeguarding and are willing to walk the extra mile.

The past couple of years have seen many successes. In 1998, Seal Beach hosted the Regional Competition. In 1999, Caroline Orr won the California Junior Guard Essay contest and in 2000 Kyle Markman continued the tradition by winning the essay contest. The future look bright for the Seal Beach Junior Lifeguard Program.