

**Vero Beach Lifeguard Association
Yearly Report
For
The Beaches of Vero Beach**

2018



Mission:

To promote water safety and lifeguarding in Vero Beach and the surrounding communities

Email: VeroBeachLA@Yahoo.com

Website: www.VBLA.org

Our Objective:

The purpose of our yearly report is to disseminate information and educate the public about the beaches within the City of Vero Beach. Our four miles of beach to include three lifeguarded beaches at Jaycee, Humiston and South Beach Parks is part of the identity of our town and the foundation for the economic, social and cultural life of our community. The report includes statistics from past years, observations, areas of progress, areas of concern and recommendations for the future. In addition, we hope to educate those in the public who otherwise may not frequent the beach by providing information about our most important local resource. VBLA wishes to thank our members who have given their time, effort and passion towards our goal of promoting a better beach for all to enjoy.

2018 STATISTICS	
Total Beach Park Attendance	838981
Preventative Actions	11708
Minor Medicals	218
Major Medicals	19
Rescues	33
Fatalities in Guarded Area	0
Fatalities in Unguarded Area	0

Observations

Total park attendance increased by 84,000 (11%) from 2017 to almost 840,000 setting the record for the most visitors on the beach since VBLA started tracking statistics in 2011. The previous record was set in 2012 with 778,000 visitors. Attendance is taken from within the beach parks to include 100 yards north and south of each guarded beach. Total attendance does not include the other 89% of the 4 miles of beach within the City limits. Estimates put the total number of people who visit our beach at well over 1 million per year.

The total number of first responder calls (medical emergencies) declined by 32% from 2017 to 237. Water rescues increased by 74% from 2017 to 33. (Note: reporting procedures changed from 2017 requiring each water rescue victim to be counted where multiple person rescues occurred. Roughly one half of all water rescues and medical emergencies occurred outside the guarded areas. Fortunately, there were no fatalities in or outside the guarded area in 2018. Medical emergencies and water rescues occurred in almost every month of the year.

February, March, April, June, July and December broke attendance records with June 2018 seeing the highest attendance (110,000) ever recorded in any month since VBLA started tracking attendance in 2011. October saw almost record low attendance because Red Tide closed the beaches from October 17-30.

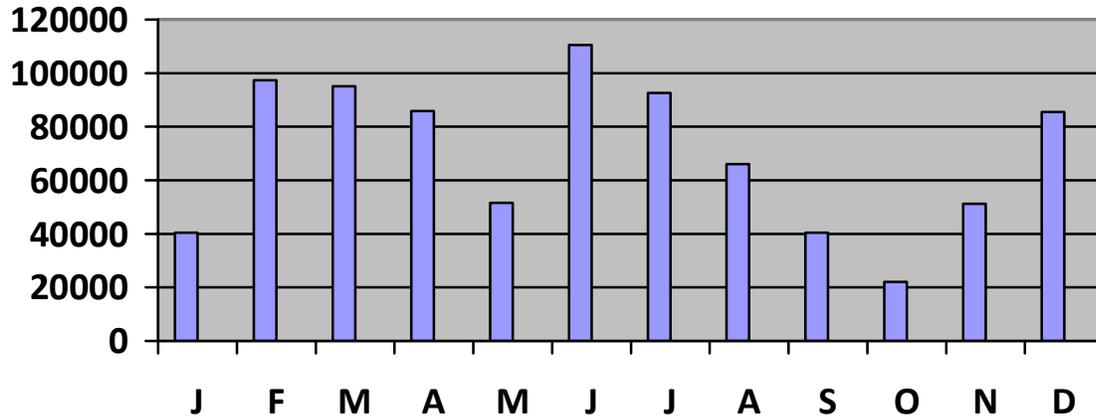
Turtle nesting season ran from April through October with turtle research volunteers marking 1 in every 12-15 nests depending on the species of turtle.

Beach grooming and trash collection was conducted by a subcontractor hired by the City of Vero Beach in the months before and after turtle nesting season. In addition, many civic groups and beach patrons took it upon themselves to clean up the trash and debris left by Mother Nature or their fellow beach goers.

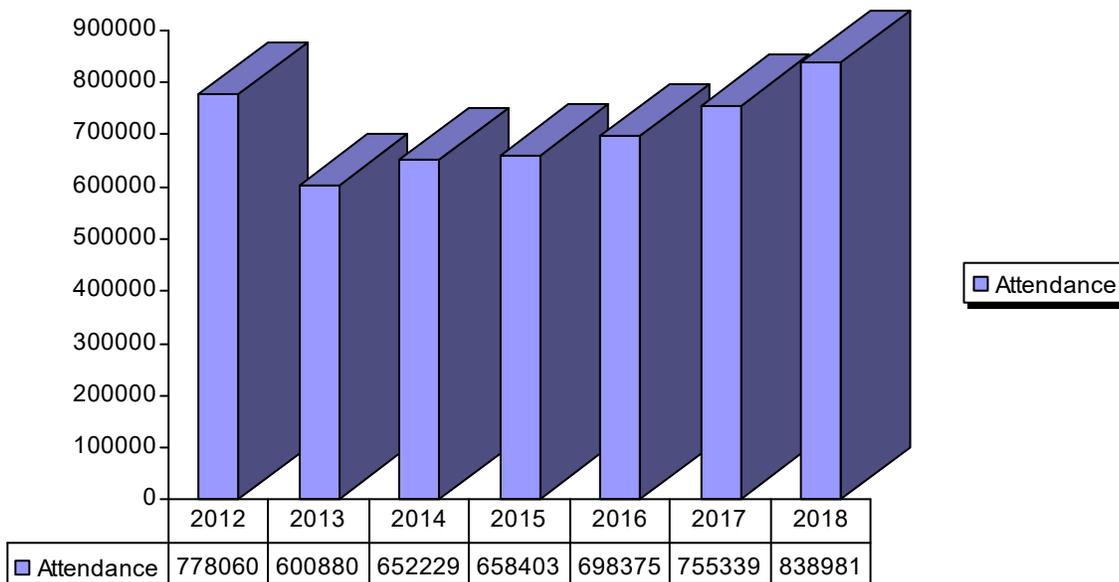
Red Tide caused major damage to the ecosystem, many beachside businesses and caused breathing problems and eye irritation to people close to the beach in the later part of October. The City and County did an impressive job cleaning up the devastation left behind by this mysterious algae.

South Beach Park and the area within "The Cove" (Riomar to Porpoise Point) continues to see growth in its beach due to migrating sand and the formation of protective, natural dunes from restrictive beach grooming.

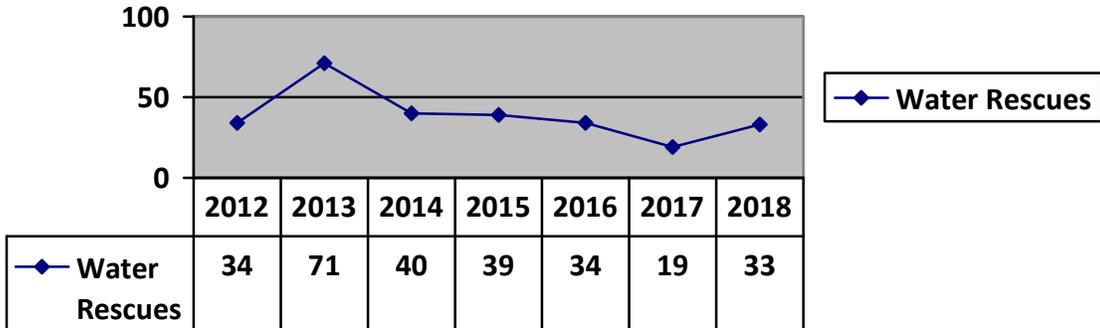
Total Beach Park Attendance: 2018 (month to month)



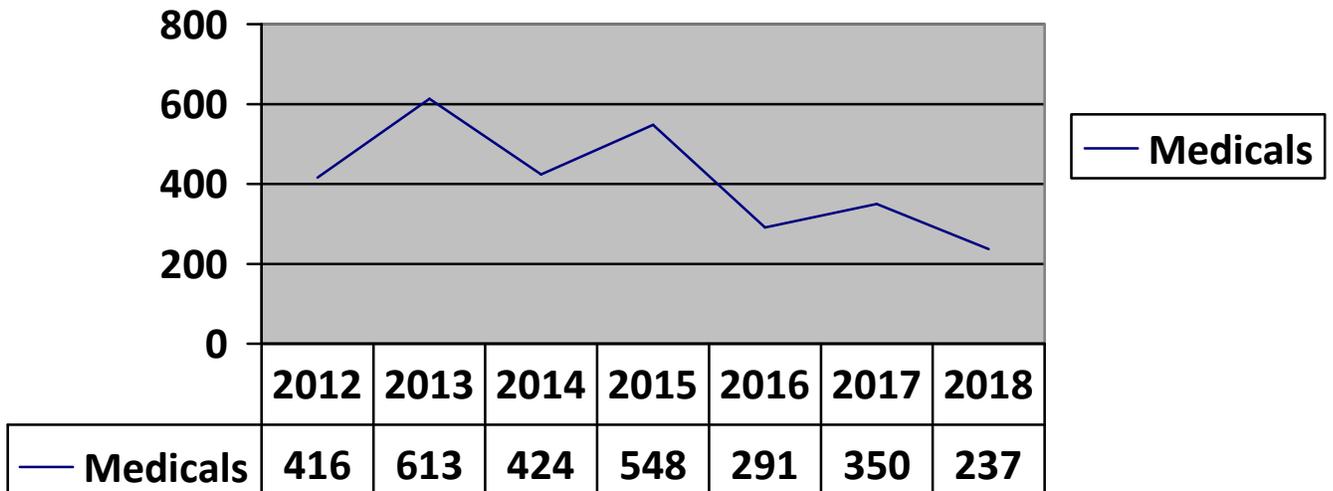
Beach Park Attendance: Year to Year Comparison



Water Rescues: Year to Year Comparison



Medical Emergencies: Year to Year Comparison



It is important to note that by grooming the beach seaweed is removed causing the beach to be weakened. Seaweed is an essential part of a healthy beach. It traps seeds and other natural materials that promote dune growth. Seabirds and crabs feed on insects and bugs found in the seaweed. The disadvantage of grooming the beach can be observed at South Beach Park where the groomed area is void of dunes. In contrast the areas not groomed have propagated healthy dunes which protect private and public property during storms.

Areas of Concern

Of 13 south Florida east coast municipalities, The City of Vero Beach ranked 2nd with the least guarded beach area (.34 miles) 3rd with the smallest percent of guarded beach (9%) and 3rd with the farthest distance between lifeguard towers (1mile) yet ranked 3rd behind Miami Beach and Hollywood Beach with the largest number of beach patrons per tower (219,500) as per a 2015 VBLA research project.

Central Beach (the "Hotel District" area north of Humiston Park to Conn Beach) continues to be popular with daily visitors and tourists staying at the beachside hotels. This area is unprotected by lifeguards and is outside the line of sight of lifeguards at Humiston and JayCee Park lifeguard towers.

Due to increased visitors and possibly the lack of parking along the beach, crowds are spreading out, away from guarded areas making it difficult for lifeguards to adequately protect the public in these areas.

Increased vagrancy, use of alcohol and drugs and other

illegal activities have been observed outside the guarded areas.

The Prefabricated Erosion Prevention (PEP) reef which runs 3000 feet from Humiston Park north to the Village Spires continues to be a hazard for swimmers as the reef is located within the shoreline just below the surface of the water.

Patrons bringing dogs on the beach continued to be a problem. City and County ordinances do not allow dogs on any city-owned beach park except for service dogs.

The restrooms at the three beach parks especially South Beach Park is in disrepair and needs to be remodeled. South Beach Park is the busiest beach park in the County. Poor maintenance of our beach park infrastructure may leave a negative impression on many visitors.

Many people visit the beach after 5pm when lifeguards leave the beach for the day. Of the deaths by drowning in the last few years, all may have been prevented if patrons swam in the guarded areas while lifeguards were on duty.

The lifeguard tower at Humiston Park is in disrepair. Lifeguards are unable to see much of the beach without having to improvise by sitting outside the tower on the boardwalk in the elements distracted by patrons and easy targets for those in the public who wish to do them harm.

Areas of Progress

The current City Council has been very proactive by authorizing the extension of lifeguard hours from 5pm to 7pm from Memorial Day to Labor Day. This lifesaving

measure may help to ensure that the number of drownings will decrease.

VBLA is trying to raise money to build a lifeguard tower and command center at Humiston Park which will give lifeguards a better field of vision of Central Beach and the hotel district, protection from the elements, unsafe situations and faster response times during beach emergencies.

The Vero Beach Police Department has stepped up patrols on the beach. This may decrease the number of illegal activities, develop better communication with the lifeguards and enhance community policing.

Recommendations

If Indian River County supplies the VBLA with more PEP reef buoys, VBLA members will continue to volunteer their time to install the buoys. These buoys may help to prevent injuries by warning swimmers of the presence of the artificial reef.

Recycling bins should be put back on the beach. The bins were heavily used allowing less waste which is helpful to the environment.

More police presence is needed on the beach particularly during holidays and weekends.

Renovate the beach park bathrooms at JayCee, Humiston and South Beach.

The City of Vero Beach Lifeguard Agency should be moved from the Recreation Department to the City of Vero Beach

Police Department. Lifeguarding, like law enforcement, is a public safety function. The move would accomplish a few things. It would combine public safety services, allow for better coordination between the police, lifeguards and fire/rescue, qualify lifeguards for grants for needed equipment saving taxpayers money and increase enforcement of illegal activities on the beach such as alcohol consumption, dogs and littering.

Key

Park Attendance: patrons within the park and areas immediately north and south of each park

Preventative Actions: stopping potential incidents before they occur

Minor Medicals: a medical incident which is treated on-site by lifeguard/EMT personnel

Major Medicals: a medical incident that required additional Emergency Medical Services

About VBLA

This report is furnished by the Vero Beach Lifeguard Association, a non-profit, 501C3 organization. Its mission is to promote water safety and lifeguarding in Vero Beach and the surrounding communities. Contact us at VeroBeachLA@Yahoo.com or (908)797-8725. Visit us at www.VBLA.org. Donations are appreciated. Monies raised are used to purchase equipment, supplies and training for the lifeguards from the city of Vero Beach. Donations via check can be mailed to : VBLA, 1351 White Heron Lane, Vero Beach, FL 32963.