

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

**2019**



**Mission:**

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

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**Website: [www.VBLA.org](http://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.

<b>2019 STATISTICS</b>	
Total Beach Park Attendance	841,413*
Preventative Actions	14,098
Minor Medicals	184
Major Medicals	22
Rescues	25
Fatalities in Guarded Area	0
Fatalities in Unguarded Area	1

\*New Record

### **Observations**

Total park attendance for 2019 increased by 2,432 visitors from 2018 to 841,413 setting the record for the most visitors on the City's beaches since VBLA started tracking statistics in 2012. The previous record was set in 2018 with 838,981 visitors. Attendance is taken from within the lifeguarded beach parks of South, Humiston and Jaycee Parks to include 100 yards north and south of each park. Total attendance does not include the other 89% of the nearly 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. Note that during the month of December, Jaycee Park was closed due to a beach renourishment program which caused attendance numbers to decrease.

The total number of first responder calls (medical emergencies) declined by 13% from 2018 to 206. Water rescues decreased by 24% from 2018 to 25. Roughly one half of all water rescues and medical emergencies occurred

outside the guarded areas.

Unfortunately, there was 1 fatality outside the guarded area near South Beach Park in September 2019 when a young man went in the ocean after 5pm when lifeguards were off duty. The last drowning fatality was in September of 2017 also at South Beach.

May, August, October and November broke monthly attendance records. March had the highest monthly beach attendance for the year with 93,265 patrons. September had very low attendance due to Hurricane Dorian. December attendance was low due to a beach renourishment project at Jaycee and Conn beach.

From Memorial Day to Labor Day, lifeguards extended their hours from 5pm to 7pm. Within that time, lifeguards conducted 1,042 preventative actions. A preventative action occurs when lifeguards either stop a problem from happening or educating beach patrons about potential hazards. Extended hours attendance was not calculated in the total beach attendance.

Memorial Day to Labor Day EXTENDED HOURS (5-7pm) STATISTICS	
Total Park Attendance	46,462
Preventative Actions	1042
Minor Medicals	7
Major Medicals	0
Rescues	0

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

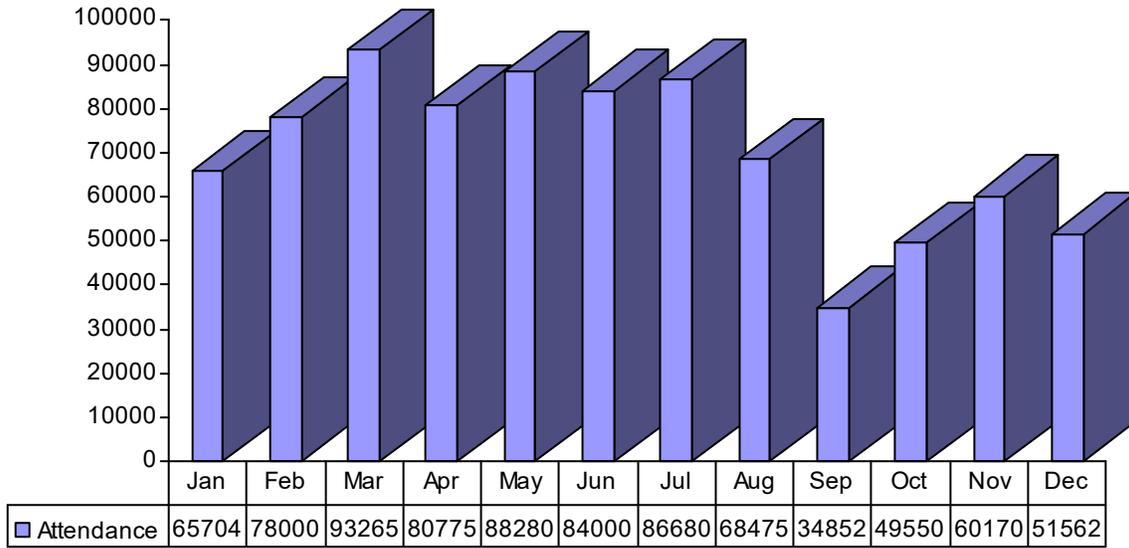
Beach grooming and trash collection was conducted by a subcontractor hired by the City of Vero Beach in the months before and after turtle nesting season. In addition, many civic groups and beach patrons took it upon themselves to clean up the trash and debris left by Mother Nature or their fellow beach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

The fatality near South Beach Park on September 30th initiated discussion as to whether to extend lifeguards hours to 7pm during more months of the year.

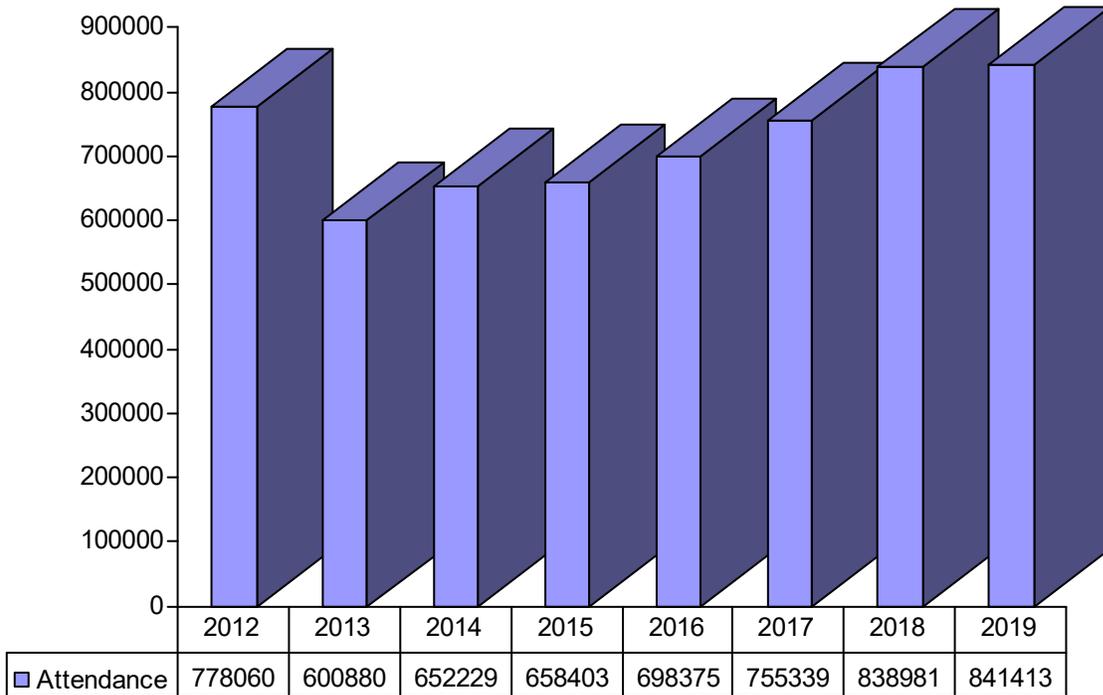
South Beach Park and the area within "The Cove" (Riomar to Porpoise Point) continues to see growth in its beach due to migrating sand and the formation of protective, natural dunes from restrictive beach grooming.

A beach renourishment program started on November 1, 2019 along most of the City of Vero Beach's shoreline. The project is to be completed by the beginning of turtle nesting season in March 2020. The program will negatively affect attendance at Jaycee and Humiston Parks as large trucks traveling along the beach will require sections of beach to be off limits to patrons.

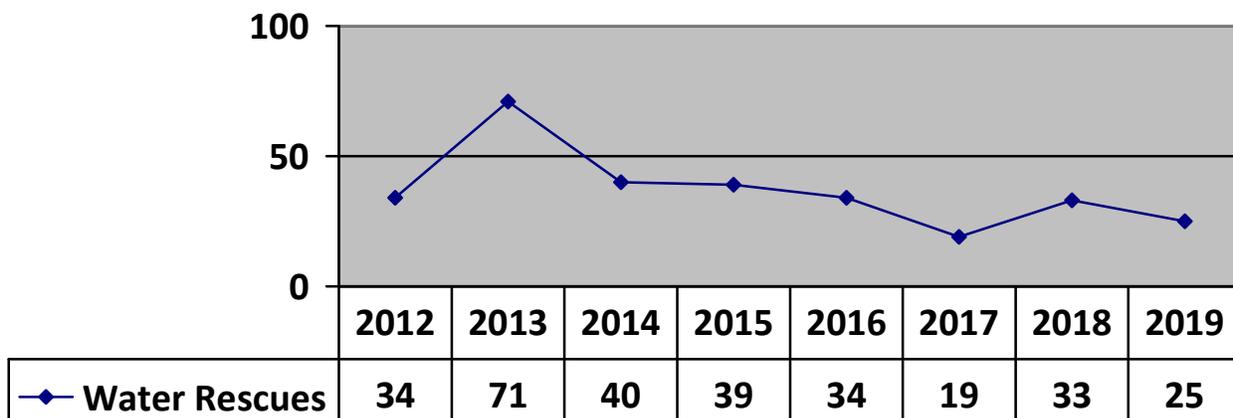
## Total Beach Park Attendance: 2019 (month to month)



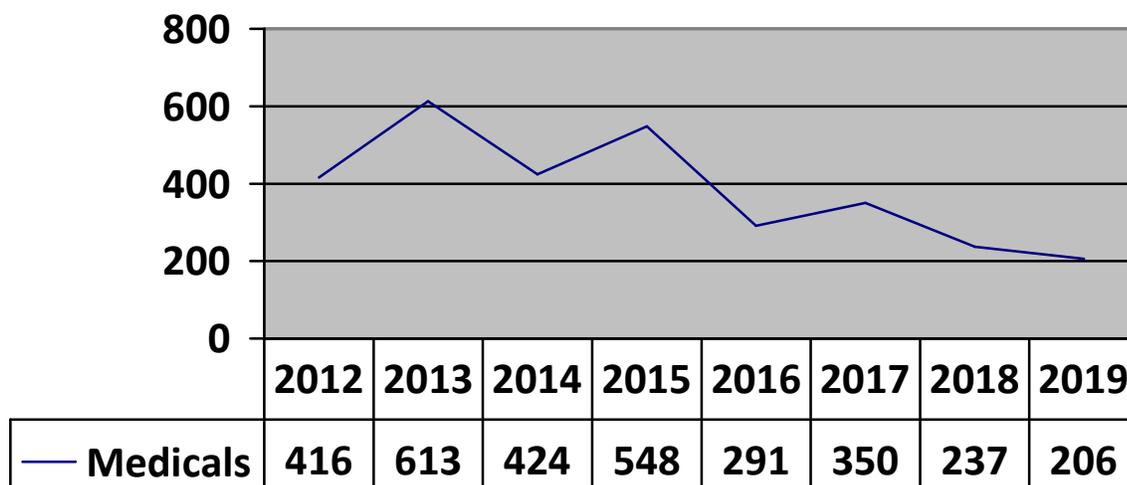
## Total Beach Park Attendance: (Year to Year)



## Water Rescues: Year to Year Comparison



## Medical Emergencies: Year to Year Comparison



## **Areas of Concern**

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. The VBLA appreciates the City's limited beach grooming techniques.

Of 13 South Florida east coast municipalities, The City of Vero Beach ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> with the least guarded beach area (.34 miles), 3<sup>rd</sup> with the smallest percent of guarded beach (9%) and 3<sup>rd</sup> with the farthest distance between lifeguard towers (1mile) yet ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 to the beach parks continued to be a big 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 renovated. 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 decrease the number of drownings.

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.

## **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 in the beach parks. The bins were heavily used resulting in 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.

Extend lifeguard hours to 7pm through the month of September.

### **Key**

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

Preventative Actions: stopping potential accidents 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](http://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.*