

**Vero Beach Lifeguard Association
YEARLY REPORT
For
The Beaches of Vero Beach**

2020



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.

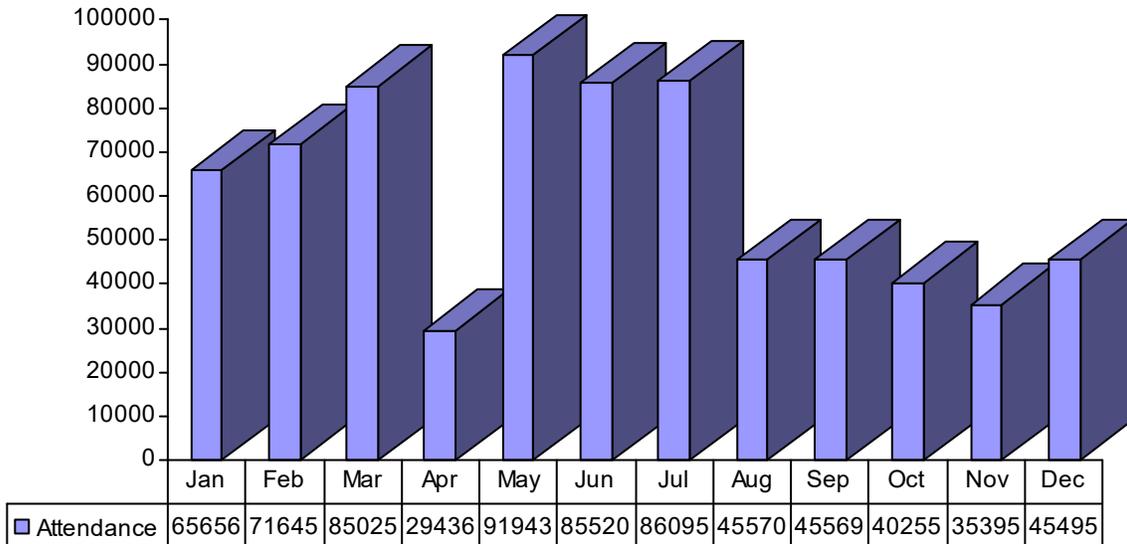
2020 STATISTICS	
Total Beach Park Attendance	729,950
Preventative Actions	10,362
Minor Medicals	227
Major Medicals	34
Rescues	36
Fatalities in Guarded Area	0
Fatalities in Unguarded Area	0

Observations

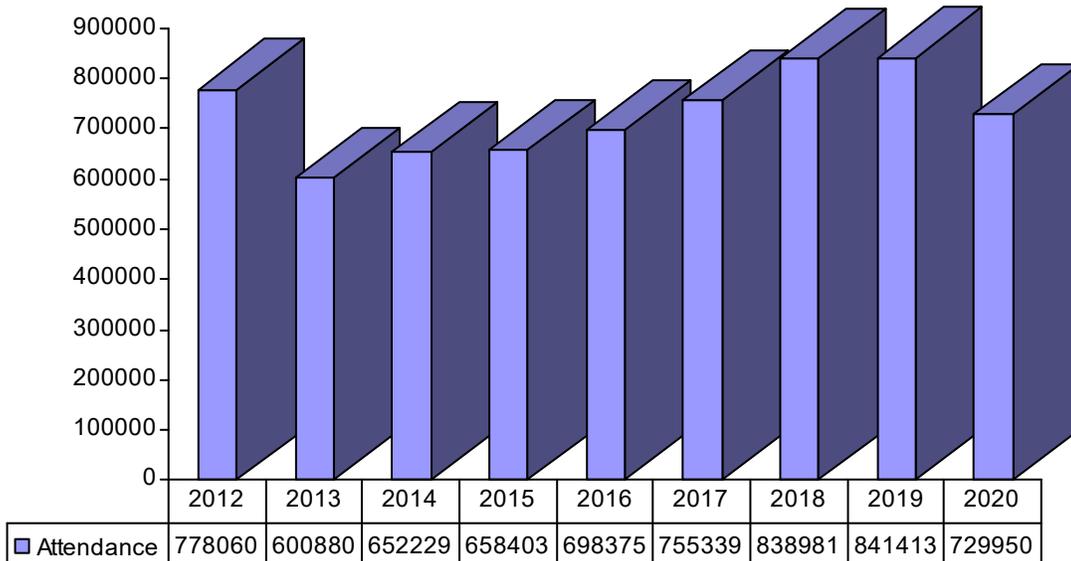
Total park attendance for 2020 did not break any records (highest: 841,413 in 2019)(lowest: 600,880 in 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic seems to be responsible for the low attendance. Attendance is taken from within the lifeguarded beach parks of South, Humiston and Jaycee Parks to include 100 yards north and south of each park. Total attendance does not include the other 89% of the nearly 4 miles of beach within the City limits. It has been observed that many people are spreading out along the shoreline and not on or near the lifeguarded areas to be counted. Estimates put the total number of people who visit our beach at over 1 million per year.

April, August and December broke monthly low attendance records. May 2020 set the record high for May beach attendance with 91,943 visitors.

Total Beach Park Attendance: 2020 (month to month)

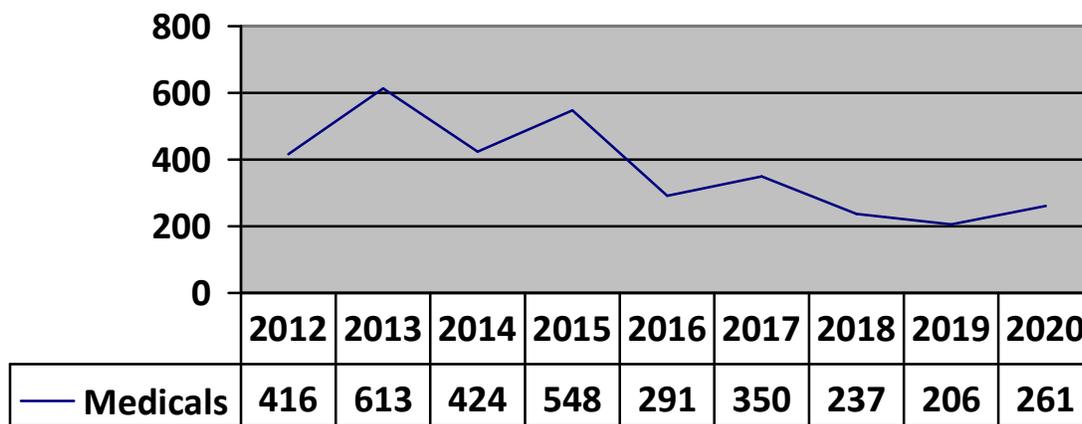


Total Beach Park Attendance: (Year to Year)

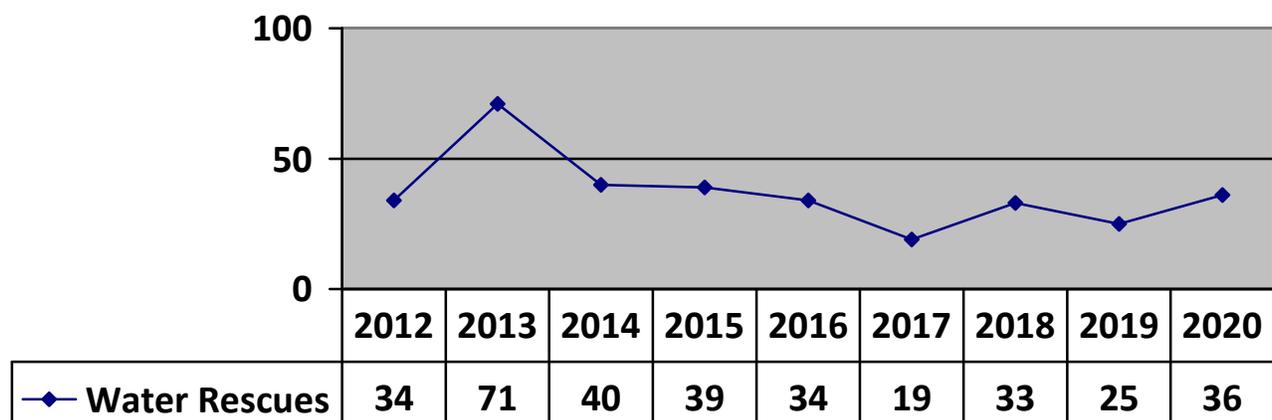


Lifeguards responded to 261 medical emergencies; an increase of 21% from 2019. There were 36 water rescues; an increase of 31% from 2019. Roughly one half of all medical emergencies and water rescues occurred outside the guarded areas. Fortunately, there were no fatalities inside or outside the guarded areas.

Medical Emergencies: Year to Year Comparison



Water Rescues: Year to Year Comparison



From May 24 to September 12 lifeguards extended their hours to 7pm. Compared to 2019 extended hours, park attendance increased by more than 8,700 visitors. Within that time, lifeguards conducted 1,448 preventative actions, responded to 16 medical emergencies and rescued a swimmer from drowning. A preventative action occurs when lifeguards either stop a problem from happening and/or educate beach patrons about potential hazards. Extended hours attendance was not included in the total beach attendance.

2019 EXTENDED HOURS SUMMARY Memorial Day – Labor Day	
Total Park Attendance	46,462
Preventative Actions	1042
Minor Medicals	7
Major Medicals	0
Rescues	0

2020 EXTENDED HOURS SUMMARY May 24 – September 12	
Total Park Attendance	55,165
Preventative Actions	1,448
Minor Medicals	11
Major Medicals	5
Rescues	1

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

Much of the beach re-nourishment sand trucked onto the beach in the winter of 2019 has been eroded away or has migrated south.

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.

The beach re-nourishment program of 2019 has changed the shoreline in some ways. There is a steeper than normal slope to the water line at South Beach Park. Strong and persistent rip currents have formed at South and Jaycee Parks where re-nourishment sand has been pulled into the surf zone. Steep slopes and ledges have formed in areas up and down the beach. We anticipate that the ocean will smooth out the shoreline in the coming year.

Beach grooming 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 and their fellow beach goers.

Areas of Concern

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

Bicyclists, skateboarders and dogs are coming into the beach parks violating a City ordinance. Signs are posted but are largely ignored.



The restrooms at the three beach parks are in disrepair. Our neglected beach infrastructure may leave a negative impression on our city by the many thousands of people who visit our beach parks every year.

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 has fallen into disrepair and has become functionless. Lifeguards are unable to see much of the beach without having to sit outside of the tower on the boardwalk in the elements.



The City has been proactive by selectively grooming the beach after turtle nesting season. It is important for the public to understand 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.

In a 2015 VBLA study, of the 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).

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 respond quickly to emergencies in these areas. Lifeguards do not have enough ATVs to quickly and effectively respond to

emergencies outside the guarded areas.

Areas of Progress

The City Council has been proactive by authorizing the extension of lifeguard hours 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 purchase needed lifeguard equipment and to build a lifeguard tower and command center at Humiston Park. An improved tower at Humiston Park 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 VBLA appreciates the City's limited beach grooming techniques.

Recommendations

Indian River County should continue to supply the VBLA with 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.



There should be more police presence on the beach to enforce the dog ordinance and other City ordinances.

When/if the Humiston boardwalk is replaced or redesigned, an emergency vehicle beach access should be built on the north end of the park adjacent to The Driftwood Inn. Lifeguards, Fire/Rescue and other first responders need an access to the beach near Central Beach and the hotel district.

The City should continue its selective beach grooming techniques.

Recycling bins should be put back in all the beach parks. The bins were heavily used resulting in less waste which is helpful to the environment.

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 Police Department. Lifeguarding, like law enforcement, is a public safety function. The move would combine public safety services, allow for better coordination between the police, lifeguards and fire/rescue, qualify our lifeguard agency for more grants for equipment which will save taxpayers money and lead to increased enforcement of illegal activities on the beach.

Continue to extend lifeguard hours to 7pm from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

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. 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.