

Water safety group gears up for lake life-saving program

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/050913/beachSM.png> **Port committee formed after teen drowned to host June 23 Surf Rescue Project classes at lakefront**

A beach safety class planned for Sunday, June 23, on Port Washington's lakefront is the culmination of nine months of work by the city's Waterfront Safety Advisory Committee — an initiative prompted by the drowning of 15-year-old Tyler Buczek last Labor Day weekend.

"This is the big kahuna, what we've been working for," said committee member Beckie Perez. "Our first and foremost initiative was water safety education.

"We have an opportunity now to gear up our children and arm them with the best safety knowledge available."



The class, which will be offered by instructors from the Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project, kicks off with classroom instruction at the Legion Hall on Lake Street from 9:30 to 11 a.m.

Instruction will then move to the north beach, where participants will go into the water to practice what they've been taught from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

A variety of safety booths, music and food will be available from organizations ranging from the Coast Guard, Department of Natural Resources and YMCA in Veterans Memorial Park until 2 p.m. that day.

The class is tailored to reflect conditions at Port Washington's beaches, making it an invaluable resource for anyone who steps in the water, Perez said.

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“I don’t care if you’ve lived here nine years like myself or your whole life, this is an opportunity to really understand what we’re up against,” she said.

Before Buczek drowned last year, few people completely understood the hazards posed by the waters off Port’s shore, Perez said.

Even personnel from the Great Lakes Surf Rescue Project first visited the Port beaches, called it a unique area when they visited, Perez said.

Dave Benjamin, executive director of the surf rescue group, said instructors will explain how the winds and structures along the beach — everything from rocks to the breakwater, impact the current and waves.

They will discuss the various currents present along the Port beach and how to deal with them, how to survive them using the Flip, Float and Follow strategy, as well as how to use flotation devices to help those in need.

Participants will also be taught the effects of cold water on swimmers and how to recognize the signs of drowning.

“This comes down to common sense knowledge. We want to increase the common sense of everyone using the Great Lakes,” Benjamin said.

That’s of paramount importance, he said, noting that already this year there have been 50 rescues on the Great Lakes.

The program is open to people of all ages, and expands upon classroom programs presented in April to students at Port Washington High School and area residents.

Benjamin said the attendance at those spring programs was encouraging, adding he hopes the June 23 program will reach even more community members.

Perez concurred, saying, “This event cannot be missed by families who frequent Port’s beaches, most importantly our youth who swim unsupervised in potentially dangerous situations.”

The class costs \$30, which includes both the classroom and water instruction. Class size is limited to 40 for the water portion of the program.

“People can still come to the beach and watch what’s happening,” Perez said. “It’s all information that can be shared and passed on.”

There is no fee for people who only want to attend the classroom session or who plan to observe the water instruction from the beach, she said.

People taking part in the water instruction will have to wear wetsuits, Perez said, noting the

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water temperature is hovering around 50 degrees.

EOS Expedition Outdoor Supply of Sheboygan has agreed to provide wetsuits for the session at a cost of \$10 to \$25 for the class, she said. To reserve suits, people are asked to call the firm at (920) 208-7873.

To reserve a spot at the classes, call Benjamin at (708) 903-0166 or visit www.glsrp.orgclasses by June 20.