

Okaloosa County News Release - 1 -

10/17/2008

Cutline: Lifeguards Maria Donato, Dan Reed and Larry Wilson were on duty saving lives at the beach when these visitors needed them.

Kathy Newby, 850.651.7515, knewby@co.okaloosa.fl.us
P08-465

Lifeguards Save Lives October Hours Cut

Lifeguards will continue patrolling the beaches, although hours will be cut starting this Saturday, October 18, 2008. Within the last two weeks, more lives were saved by lifeguards.

A recent visitor sent the following letter to Lifeguard Supervisor Rich Huffnagle:

Mr. Rich Huffnagle,

I'm writing to thank you and the lifeguards at Ft. Walton Beach for rescuing my coworkers and myself, Wednesday, October 8. We were in Florida for some work at Eglin AFB. Wednesday after work the four of us (Bruce, Joe, Jim and I) went down to the beach in front of our hotel for a swim. Everything seemed to be fine, I was about 50 yards offshore and trying to get a body surfing ride from the waves that were breaking there, without much success. I was getting a little tired and decided to head back to shore. I soon realized I wasn't making much headway in that direction; I was caught in a rip current. As I kept trying I just got more and more tired with out getting much closer to the beach. I remembered that when you get into one of these currents you're supposed to swim parallel to the beach to get out of it. I tried but between my own exhaustion and the waves breaking over my head I started to realize I could be in a fight for my life. About that time I saw a lifeguard coming into the water toward me. Two of us were close together, with the other two further out. He quickly reached us and asked if we needed help. We both said yes, so he had us hold onto his red float while he pulled us to safety. When we reached safety the guard turned around and went back out to help the other two. I was very tired and shaky and grateful to be safe. I saw that Bruce and Joe were still pretty far out with Bruce being the farthest. Soon some other lifeguards arrived to help. Joe, who is a runner and very fit, made it back safely w/ minimal assistance. Bruce was rescued by one of the additional guards. When he was brought back to shore he was very pale and extremely exhausted. I'm sure he wouldn't have made it without the help.

One of the lifeguards instructed us about the danger of secondary drowning. Bruce was taken to the hospital where he was examined and given a chest x-ray. After a couple of hours at the hospital we were told that Bruce's lungs were clear and that he would recover. I was very impressed with all of the lifeguard's knowledge and rescue abilities. They've obviously had excellent training and are very capable.

I'm very grateful to God and to all the lifeguards who helped with our rescue. I don't know whether I would be at home with my family if they hadn't been there to help. Thank you very much!!

*Sincerely,
Scott Thomas*

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Lifeguard hours of operation will be 10:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. Beach Warning Flags will be raised at the public accessways on Okaloosa Island at 10:00 a.m. and will be brought down at 5:00pm daily throughout the remainder of October. We will continue with limited patrols throughout the winter months until March when normal operations resume.

Please use caution when visiting Okaloosa Beaches during the fall and winter season. Heavy surf and strong currents are commonly present during this time making for extremely hazardous conditions. Officials also recommend to swim in areas with lifeguards on duty and to always utilize caution when in the water. If you are planning a day at the beach over the winter, check out the Okaloosa Beach Safety Website for important information on conditions and hazards. Also, beach and travel conditions in many counties in Florida can be accessed by visiting the web site. Visit www.okaloosaf.com or call 850-609-5111 or 651-7150 for more information.

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