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TIMESLEDGER Newspapers:

Rockaways need lifeguards

Shortage has caused Parks Dept. to close borough beaches

By Howard Koplowitz
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A shortage of lifeguards has led to the closing of several Rockaway beaches, frustrating would-be swimmers and leading to complaints from the Queens Civic Congress.

Shoring up the hearts of thousands of disappointed beachgoers, a Queens politician remains hopeful that Rockaway beaches are expected to reopen within the next few days.



Photo by Christina Santucci

City Councilman Joseph Addabbo, Jr. (D-Howard Beach) is highly optimistic that additional Rockaway beaches will open shortly now that the city's schools have closed and more lifeguards will be available.

A shortage of lifeguards patrolling Rockaway beaches has closed portions of the shoreline since Memorial Day and created "an intolerable situation," the Queens Civic Congress told the city Parks Department recently. The QCC, comprised of 110 civic organizations throughout the borough, wrote to Parks to find out when it could expect Rockaway beaches to be open in its entirety.

"Since Memorial Day, beachgoers found red flags flying, indicating 'No Swimming Allowed' along the too many stretches of Rockaway shoreline," wrote QCC President Corey Bearak and the organization's Parks Committee Co-Chairwoman Barbara Larkin. "This intolerable situation must change."

Addabbo said Tuesday the situation appears to be changing.

"Because [the] Fourth of July has passed, more lifeguards are going from the classroom to the beach," Addabbo said, adding that he expects additional beaches to open in the coming days. "I am very optimistic about this situation. We will probably have about 1,200 lifeguards, slightly more than last year."

The Parks Department said in a statement that last month's "unusually hot weather drew larger crowds than normal to the beach even though summer had not yet arrived."

"Many of our lifeguards are high school students still in school during the month of June and lifeguard staffing levels typically do not reach their peak until the Fourth of July," the agency said.

Jonathan Gaska, district manager of Community Board 14, said the city could alleviate the lifeguard shortage it has been experiencing over the last decade by moving tests and training for Rockaway lifeguards from Manhattan to Queens.

He suggested that the "Olympic-style facilities" that opened recently at Flushing Meadows Corona Park would be appropriate.

"I can't think of a better place in the city to train and test lifeguards," he said. "They need to make it more convenient for city teenagers and young adults to qualify" to become a lifeguard.

Reach reporter Howard Koplowitz by e-mail at hkoplowitz@timesledger.com or by phone at 718-229-0300, Ext. 173.

[Previous Queens Civic Congress Posts on Lifeguards at our beaches:](#)

[2008-06-23 Queens Civic Congress seeks Lifeguards so Beaches Open](#) (Letter to Parks Commissioner)

[2008-01-22 Crime Prevention and Safety Issues in City Parks](#)
Queens Civic Congress Vice President Barbara Larkin testifies before City Council Parks and Recreation and Public Safety Committees (includes Lifeguards)

[2007-11-13 Testimony on the City's Lifeguards Program](#) to the City Council Parks and Recreation Committee