

Remember to always swim near a lifeguard!



“Both faith and fear may sail into your harbor, but allow only faith to drop anchor.” ~Anon.

## A Little Bit of Wildwood History:

### THE LIFEGUARD BY MEG CORCORAN

Author Samuel Beckett once said, “There’s never an end for the sea.” Its vastness, in fact, is what originally required the services of lifeguards prior to the 1900’s. Lifeguards were initially hired to aid fishermen and sailors as they charted the dangerous waters to earn their living. Shipwrecks were common in those times, and tourist’s safety was not high on the list of priorities. By 1895, however, the number of summer by the sea visitors had grown, and the need to protect them from dangerous currents grew along with that.

Long before condominiums became the rage, private bath houses on the beach reigned (the best known in town was Sweet’s Bath House on Schellenger Avenue). Bathhouses were owned by the early hotels and were made available to both hotel guests and the public while providing convenience (and changing facilities for 25 cents). As business increased, the owners of the Washington Hotel and Sweet’s and Model Bath Houses worried about their guests’ safety and hired Howard Buck to watch over swimmers.

By 1905, beachgoer’s safety took center stage as the city took over the job of hiring lifeguards. In June of that year they hired John Wick and Daniel Briggs for the summer season. The first beach patrol in North Wildwood was appointed by Mayor Harry Hoffman. By summer’s end, the city had added two more men to the lifeguard list.

The short list of lifeguards is, perhaps, what prompted a “Mr. Schade,” in 1906, to submit a letter to the Holly Beach Council, asking that he be named a city lifeguard because, as he stated, “I have an outfit.”

Possessing a one-piece wool tank suit, however, does not a lifeguard make, and in the winter of 1909, council discussed forming a beach patrol. In July 1910, four lifeguards were hired. One more lifeguard was added in the summer of 1911.

In 1912, Holly Beach and North Wildwood merged. A motion was passed, enabling the police committee to hire seven lifeguards (and one more if necessary). Part of their responsibility was to keep swimmers away from Montgomery Ave. when fishing boats came in. The task was arduous and required volunteers, fishing boats, and the US Lifesaving Service to work alongside lifeguards.

In 1925, with the role of lifeguards becoming increasingly important, the Wildwood Beach Patrol finally had a place to call headquarters. Hospital tents for Wildwood, North Wildwood, and Wildwood Crest were put in place, eventually giving way to one-story buildings, which, in turn, ultimately became two-story buildings with medical rooms, offices, lockers, and showers. The Wildwood Beach Patrol would eventually become the first to have transportation on the beach.

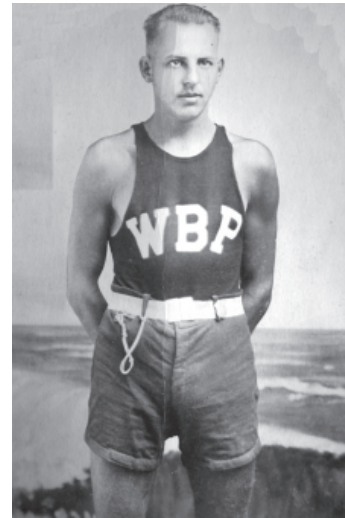
Adding to their list of “firsts,” history was made in June 1933, when under some protest and much publicity, Wildwood became the first city in the country to have women lifeguards as appointed by then-mayor Doris Bradway. Although May Ottey and Florence Newton, both 24-years old and Pennsylvania residents, had passed the same painstaking test as their male counterparts, they were portrayed by the press as beauty pageant winners and were often referred to as “the girls.” May served for two years, with no information stating that Florence served beyond that summer.

In the early 1900’s, a lifeguard’s salary was \$50 a month. By the 1940’s, the pay rate was \$3.25 an hour. It was in the early 1990’s that the pay rate began to climb.

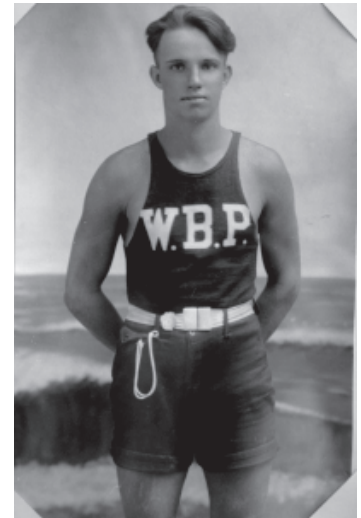
As the years passed, the faces (and the fashions) have changed, but the commitment of lifeguards remains constant. Through the years, the Wildwoods lifeguards have been born from dedicated college students, devoted athletes, and disciplined professionals all adhering to the same goal: keeping beachgoers safe while respecting both the calm and the chaos of the currents. English nobleman and explorer Humphrey Gilbert profoundly stated, “We are as near to heaven by sea as by land.”

As we begin our SUNsational summer at the shore, we look forward to another safe season and thank our lifeguards for watching over our hint of heaven by the sea!

Thanks to Bob Bright and the staff at the Wildwood Historical society for all their help and for the photos. The museum has many albums filled with lifeguard photos, newspaper clippings and stories... stop in for a visit soon!



1915, Richard Walker



1918, Tinney Kincaide



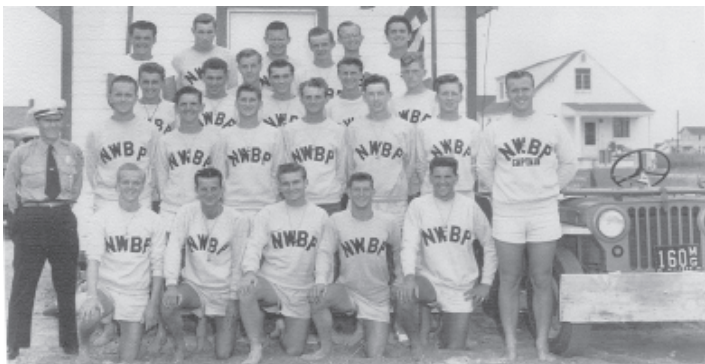
1931, Frank Harrison, William Shilling, & Mayor Bob Pierpont



Armand Ott Russo, WBP 1941



1974, Mike Regusch “Rego”



North Wildwood Beach Patrol ~ 1949