

# The CALSURF

Volume 31 No.1



*The Official Newsletter of the  
California Surf Lifesaving Association*

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## THE CALSURF NEWS

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## EVENTS CALENDAR 2026/27

### Fall 2026 CSLSA Board of Directors Meeting

Dates: TBA | Location: Santa Cruz, CA

### USLA 2026 National Lifesaving Conference & Expo

Dates: November 9-12, 2026 | Location: Jacksonville, FL

### 2026 California Surf Lifesaving Championships

Dates: July 24-25, 2026 | Location: TBD

### 2026 USLA Jr. Lifeguard/Lifeguard Nationals

Dates: August 4-7, 2026 | Location: Ft. Lauderdale, FL

### Spring 2027 CSLSA Board of Directors Meeting

Dates: TBD | Location: TBD

### Spring 2027 USLA Board of Directors Meeting

Dates: TBD | Location: TBD



The USLA is rolling out a new approach to meetings in 2026, with a stronger emphasis on education in the fall. The highlight of the year will be the **National Lifesaving Conference & Expo**, taking place **November 9–12** in **Jacksonville, Florida**. This expanded event will feature multiple days of speakers and hands-on learning, so mark your calendar!

To support that shift, the **Spring Business Summit**, presented by the **American Red Cross**, will be held **April 21–22** in **Biloxi, Mississippi**. This streamlined, two-day meeting focuses on Board and committee business, keeping spring travel short while allowing more energy to go into the fall conference. Learn more and register at [USLA.org/events](http://USLA.org/events).





# MEDAL OF VALOR AWARD



**Marc Brown, Cortez Ritumalta,  
Greg Nelsen, Eric Kleymann**

## Mission Bay Rescue

On March 28, 2025, at 6:30 p.m., Dispatch received a request to check the disposition of two people walking on the Mission Bay Channel Entrance jetty. At the time, the surf was ten feet, and the swell direction was directly impacting the tip of the jetty. The conditions were reported to be unlike anything even the seasoned lifeguards had experienced.

**Lifeguard III Mark Brown** was the first on scene, swimming onto the rocks after being dropped off by a rescue boat. Timing the swell astutely, Brown made access up and onto the rocks where he scrambled to high ground before the next wave made his hand and footholds awash. Brown located one victim who told him that his friend was stuck in the rocks and pointed to a crevice below. The low light made it difficult to see amidst the sea spray and impact of the relentless surf.

Additional resources were already en route. **Lifeguard II Cortez Ritumalta** was transported to the scene via RWC. **Lifeguard IIs Greg Nelsen** and **Eric Kleymann** arrived on scene via land and then were transported by Bay Boat Rescue 3 to the end of the jetty. Ritumalta, Nelsen, and Kleymann made access onto the jetty in the same manner as Brown, all remarkably without incident.

As the four of them got to work scheming how to free the trapped victim, a rescue helicopter, Copter 2, arrived on scene above. Communication was difficult due to the volume created by the wave action against the rocks. Loud booms and echoes were consistent as the sets punished the rocks.

The rhythmic thumping of the helicopter’s blades added to the ensemble. Due to the location of the victim, tide level, and impacting surf, the team had to time their actions between waves and during the lull. With only wetsuits for PPE and no tools other than their manpower, progress was slow.

As rescue efforts continued, what would later be described as “the biggest wave of the night” slammed the rocks and swept all four rescuers off their feet, bringing them to rest in a pile on top of one another. Copter 2 reported that all rescuers had been “wiped out” and called for more resources including Coast Guard assets. Fortunately, Copter 2’s assessment wasn’t entirely accurate.

While Nelsen came out unscathed, Brown broke his ankle, and Ritumalta and Kleymann both sustained head and facial injuries. Ritumalta’s helmet was even cracked, possibly saving his life. Injured and rattled, but not deterred from the mission, the team resumed their work to free the trapped victim.

Finally, during a lull in the set the victim was freed. Copter 2 lowered a basket and rescue technician. The patient was extricated and ultimately survived.

Due to the lifeguards’ skill and persistence, despite personal injury and risk, a family member went home safe that day.



For their heroic lifesaving actions, **Marc Brown, Cortez Ritumalta, Greg Nelsen,** and **Eric Kleymann** are hereby awarded the California Surf Lifesaving Association and the United States Lifesaving Association’s **Medal of Valor Award**.



# MEDAL OF VALOR AWARD



**Marea Zlatunich**

## Panther Beach Rescue

On August 17, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., California State Parks **Lifeguard II Marea Zlatunich** was patrolling the area of Panther Beach, north of Santa Cruz, when she was dispatched to a 911 call for a missing suicidal juvenile in the area. After searching the area for approximately one hour, a ranger received a report from a bystander that they had a visual of a victim in the water, south of Panther Beach. The victim was believed to be the missing person.

In order to access the shoreline from which a swimming rescue could be initiated, Zlatunich drove her lifeguard vehicle as close as she could and then took off on foot. With her rescue tube in hand and her pocket mask stowed in her pocket, she ran a half mile down the beach. Rangers on top of the cliff signaled her to assist in maintaining visual on the victim. She followed the hand signals until she located the victim floating face down approximately 450 yards from shore, outside the breaking waves.

The surf was 4-5 feet with 10 knot winds. Sea surface conditions were sloppy, increasing the difficulty to maintain visual of the victim from sea level. Zlatunich entered the 60-degree water, swam through the surf zone and made contact with the victim. The female victim was face down, unconscious and met the description of the missing person.

Zlatunich flipped the patient over and began to consider her extrication options. Seeing no rescue boats on the horizon, she turned her gaze shoreward. Going back the way she came was going to be challenging due to wave size and rip currents. The current had also transported her further south. She spotted a pocket cove and made the decision to extricate there. By herself, she negotiated the 4–5-foot shore break with her victim. Once shallow enough to stand, she carried the victim up the beach to continue care.

**Continued on next page.**

With a cliff surrounding three sides, and an ocean in front of her, Zlatunich confirmed the patient was pulseless and apneic and began CPR. Knowing the remote nature of her location—and the lengths it took her to arrive—Zlatunich did not know how long she would be by herself. She had no radio, no medical kit, and no AED. With nothing but a pocket mask and a pair of wet gloves, she heroically performed CPR on the patient for 20 minutes, giving the patient the best chance of survival she could.

Finally, backup from a Santa Cruz Fire Department Rescue Swimmer/Paramedic and lifeguard arrived. Three-person CPR was performed. Unfortunately, despite the rescuers' effort, the patient was pronounced deceased by the Paramedic. Zlatunich and team swam the patient back through the surf to a Santa Cruz Harbor Patrol vessel.

As first responders, even when we apply our full training and effort, some outcomes remain beyond our control due to circumstances outside our influence. Nevertheless, the dedication, courage, and risks we undertake often provide meaningful comfort to grieving families, demonstrating that everything possible was done to save their loved one.

For her heroic lifesaving actions, **Marea Zlatunich** is hereby awarded the California Surf Lifesaving Association and the United States Lifesaving Association's **Medal of Valor Award**.



## HEROIC ACT, MERITORIOUS ACT & NATIONAL LIFESAVING AWARD



**Marcos Pimentel, Jeff Hatfield, Scott Swenson, Jim LeBeau, Olivia Klugg, Paul Rudell, Nathan Swank, John Maher, Garrett Chamberlin, Jake Stone, Mike Cranston**

### Bird Rock Rescue

On August 8, 2025, at 4:14 p.m., the San Diego Lifeguard Communication Center received a 911 call reporting a capsized vessel in the Bird Rock area of La Jolla. **Sergeant Jim LeBeau** received the dispatch and requested a rescue boat, RWCs, and land units to respond. Rescue boat "Rescue West" was first on scene with operator **LGIII Jeff Hatfield** and crew **LGIII Marcos Pimentel** onboard.

They found a 25-foot cuddy cabin overturned in 8 feet of water being pummeled by 6-foot breaking waves in the surf zone. Multiple victims had been ejected from the vessel due to wave action. Four victims without PFDs were holding on to the hull and yelling for help. The overturned vessel and victims were being pushed toward the rocky shore by the surf toward dangerous uneven reef.

Pimentel swam to the victims who cried out that there was an additional victim trapped underneath. Triaging the situation, Pimentel free dove under the wreckage. Beneath the vessel, and amidst the breaking waves, he found a low visibility debris filled environment. He swam through the darkness, on mission to locate the victim. Pimentel located the unconscious victim and swam him downwards, beneath the gunwales and breaking waves, then back up to the surface.

Meanwhile, Lt. Mike Cranston acted as rescue group supervisor coordinating the other responding units on land and sea. He directed the first RWC on scene, operated by **LGII Scott Swenson**, to assist Pimentel with the critical patient.

Swenson positioned the sled for Pimentel to load the victim and the two accelerated through the surf and shallow reefs to a lifeguard receiving team on shore.

The receiving team consisted of **Sgt. Jim LeBeau, Lt. John Maher**, and lifeguards **Olivia Klugg, Paul Rudell, and Nathan Swank**. The team was positioned at the rocky shoreline to receive the victim as he arrived for delivery. CPR was in progress as Pimentel and Swenson arrived. The victim was transferred from the rescue sled to a rescue paddleboard for extrication through the intertidal zone of uneven reef, offshore pinnacles, rocks and mussels.

Upon reaching land, the receiving team negotiated the patient up a narrow staircase to numerous San Diego Fire Department resources waiting above. Their teamwork facilitated not only a rapid extrication to higher medical care, but also unceasing CPR the entire time.

As this was taking place, the second RWC crewed by **Garrett Chamberlin and Jake Stone** arrived on scene. They maneuvered their craft through the breaking waves and debris field to rescue the non-critical patients, still clinging to the hull. Each patient was subsequently transported to shore for treatment. All five patients were transported to the hospital. Due to the lifeguards quick thinking and teamwork, the critical patient survived.

For their heroic lifesaving actions, **Marcos Pimentel, Jeff Hatfield, Scott Swenson, Jim LeBeau, Olivia Klugg, Paul Rudell, Nathan Swank, and John Maher** are hereby awarded the California Surf Lifesaving Association's **Heroic Act Award**. **Garrett Chamberlin, Jake Stone, and Mike Cranston** are hereby awarded the California Surf Lifesaving Association's **Meritorious Act Award**. All rescuers were awarded with the United States Lifesaving Association's **National Lifesaving Award**.



## HEROIC ACT & MERITORIOUS ACT AWARD



**Judah Ely, Thomas Alspaugh,  
Tyler Hayes**

### Del Mar Beach Rescue

On September 28, 2025, at 9:30 a.m., at Camp Pendleton's Del Mar Beach, Air Force veteran Scott Muir caught a wave. Scott wiped out, resulting in his head hitting the sand about five feet below the water's surface. He reported hearing and feeling a pop in his neck upon impact, which fractured his C6/C7 vertebrae and resulted in major spinal cord damage. Immediately and completely paralyzed, he was oriented face down in the surf zone without the ability to get to the surface to breathe. Conscious throughout the entire event, Scott was rolled around underwater as he was struck by oncoming waves. He would later report that he presumed he was going to drown.

**Judah Ely**, surfing nearby, witnessed Scott catch this wave and wanted to congratulate Scott on the ride. After catching the wave, Judah noticed Scott did not resurface.

As a second wave hit, Judah briefly saw Scott’s head and shoulders before a third wave obscured him completely. Judah spotted Scott’s surfboard adrift and swam toward it. Arriving at the board, Judah dove beneath the surface and began searching underwater with his hands outstretched until he finally located Scott. Were it not for Scott’s leash remaining attached to his board, the process of locating him underwater and subsequent outcome would have been very different.

Judah successfully pulled Scott to the surface and positioned him on his chest so he could breathe, saving him from drowning. He shouted out to nearby surfer, **Thomas Alspaugh**, who quickly responded, alerted other surfers in the area and signaled lifeguards on the beach. Thomas, an off-duty OC Lifeguard at Salt Creek Beach, recognized the need for spinal precautions. Together, Judah and Thomas worked to bring Scott toward the safety of the beach while lifeguards mobilized a response. Thomas recalled later, “it was pretty instinctual, because of what has been programmed into me as a lifeguard, I knew what to do”.

Meanwhile, Tyler Hayes, who was in the near shore catching a wave, saw the commotion from a distance. Recognizing the urgency, he ran to the scene and assisted lifeguards in securing Scott onto a backboard for transport. Tyler then accompanied lifeguards to meet fire personnel behind the lifeguard station in the parking lot to ensure continuity of care during the emergency response.

Thanks to Judah’s decisive action in dangerous surf conditions and the coordinated efforts of Thomas and Tyler, Scott was swiftly rescued and given the critical assistance he needed. Scott was airlifted to Scripps La Jolla Hospital before beginning a longer rehabilitation stay at Craig Hospital in Colorado.

On Sunday December 20, Judah met Scott at Doheny State Beach to cheer him on as Scott caught his first wave since the accident.

For his decisive lifesaving actions, **Tyler Hayes** is hereby awarded the California Surf Lifesaving and United States Lifesaving Association’s **Meritorious Act Award**. For their heroic lifesaving actions, **Judah Ely** and **Thomas Alspaugh** are hereby awarded the California Surf Lifesaving Association & United States Lifesaving Association’s **Heroic Act Award**.



**Junior Lifeguard Rescue at Bass Lake**

On August 9, 2025, “off duty” **Huntington Beach City Junior Lifeguard Cash Hernandez** was enjoying a summer Saturday with family on Bass Lake.

The family went tubing and Cash volunteered to man the safety flag. Cash’s adult cousin Michelle was in the water on the tube with her daughter Harlow. Michelle’s husband Chris was driving the boat.

When the boat accelerated out of the hole, instead of the tube coming up on plane as everyone expected it to, the tube sounded beneath the water’s surface. Both Michelle and Harlow held onto the tube as it sounded before eventually losing their grip and becoming separated from the tube, line and boat.

Cash dutifully raised the orange flag as Chris began to circle around to pick up the swimmers. But when Michelle and Harlow surfaced there was a look of panic on his cousin, Michelle. Harlow saw the look on her mom’s face and became panicked herself.

Ever-attentive to the water, Cash recognized the swimmers’ fear, panic, and distress like he was taught from his training as a junior lifeguard. Seeing the urgency of the situation, Chris began steering the boat back toward his family. But Chris was struck with panic himself, and not sure how to help his family.

Before Chris could think about what to do next, Cash dropped the flag and ran past Chris and dove off the stern of the boat. Cash swam to Michelle first as she was in the most distress, another skill learned from the JG program. Cash swam Michelle back to the boat and then did the same for Harlow.

Thanks to Cash’s participation in the Huntington Beach City Junior Lifeguard program, he was able to recognize a rescue situation and respond in a timely fashion and bring the victim back to the boat safely with no major issues.

For his decisive lifesaving actions, **Cash Hernandez** is hereby awarded the California Surf Lifesaving Association’s **Meritorious Act Award**.



**Junior Lifeguard of the Year**



The Seal Beach Lifesaving Association are proud to nominate **Lincoln Happoldt** (left) and **John Whitlock** (right), the recipients of the Seal Beach “B” Junior Lifeguard of the Year Award, for the **CSLSA Junior Lifeguard of the Year**.

These boys truly embody what it means to be a Seal Beach Junior Lifeguard – from developing their lifeguard skills to showing respect, camaraderie, and leadership. Their dedication and character stood out all summer, and when faced with a challenging situation, they demonstrated incredible bravery and quick thinking.

Continued on next page.

The Seal Beach Junior Lifeguard program faced an unexpected tragedy this summer. Lincoln and John's instructor, Isaiah Osorio, suffered a life-altering cervical injury while on duty. Isaiah struck bottom while swimming with his JG group, resulting in immediate deficits. Lincoln and John quickly recognized the situation as Isaiah was left floating face down in the water. While they are not trained lifeguards, they used the knowledge they learned throughout their years in the program to perform lifesaving techniques. Working together, they effectively flipped Isaiah over onto his back, allowing Isaiah to breathe and saving his life. Their actions triggered an emergency response, and nearby instructors arrived on scene to complete the rescue.

Following the accident, Lincoln and John continued to stay positive and hopeful, being some of the first to reach out and visit Isaiah in the hospital. Our lifeguard family, Isaiah's family, and Isaiah are forever grateful for Lincoln and John's heroism. For their decisive actions and leadership in the program, the Seal Beach Junior Guard program is extremely excited to nominate these two Junior Guards for this award.

## Junior Lifeguard Training Shines During Real-Life Harbor Rescue

By Lola Swank

A routine fishing trip out of Oceanside Harbor turned into a life-saving rescue on Sunday, November 2, 2025, thanks in part to the calm leadership and training of a local Junior Guard.

**Nathan Usher** was fishing with his father and grandfather when they encountered a capsized boat carrying five individuals who were in immediate need of assistance. Without hesitation, Nathan jumped into action, demonstrating the skills and composure he developed through the Junior Lifeguard (JG) program.

Nathan assisted in safely bringing three individuals aboard his family's boat and immediately began administering basic first aid. Remaining calm under pressure, he helped stabilize the victims while assessing their needs. Witnesses noted his confidence and professionalism so much so that the rescued individuals believed Nathan was part of an official rescue team.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Nathan also waved down a nearby personal watercraft and effectively directed the operator to assist those still in the water. With coordinated efforts, two additional individuals were removed from the water and transferred onto the family's boat.

Going above and beyond, Nathan offered his own clothing to help keep one of the victims warm while awaiting professional responders. Oceanside Lifeguards and the Marine Safety Unit arrived shortly thereafter and safely transported all five individuals to shore. Three people were taken to a local hospital for further evaluation.

This incident serves as a powerful reminder of the real-world impact of the Junior Lifeguard program, which emphasizes water safety, emergency response, teamwork, and leadership. Nathan's actions exemplify how early training and education can empower young people to respond effectively in critical situations—making a meaningful difference when it matters most.



 watchtower



# San Clemente Lifeguards Conquer the Catalina Channel

By Nic Giugni, Ocean Lifeguard

## Hayden Paul and Jonas Hawbecker Complete 21.6-Mile Crossing

Before the 2025 summer season even began, two San Clemente lifeguards made a decision that would shape their entire year.

**Hayden Paul**, full-time lifeguard with the **City of San Clemente Marine Safety**, and seasonal lifeguard **Jonas Hawbecker** committed to swimming the Catalina Channel — from Two Harbors on **Santa Catalina Island** to White Point Beach on the mainland. To make it real, they wrote a contract.



Daily training. Strict diet. No alcohol. No excuses. They signed it before summer even started.

## Building the Foundation

Most mornings began the same way: a 2.5-mile run south of the San Clemente Pier to Cottons Point, followed by an ocean swim back to Lifeguard Headquarters just north of the pier. While other guards occasionally joined to stay sharp for the season, Hayden and Jonas were building something bigger. Saturdays meant driving north to Newport Beach for pier-to-pier swims with local lifeguard, Bryan Buck.

On other days, they pushed farther — logging a 7-mile swim from Cottons Point to Dana Point, stacking 2–3 miles daily, and mixing in 5–12 mile swims several times a month. By late summer, the base was built. The distance was there. The mindset was sharpening. But one problem remained: they needed a support boat.



## Enter Monte

After watching their discipline and dedication all season, I made a call to my longtime friend, former San Clemente lifeguard **Monte Livingston**. Monte owned a 16-foot Boston Whaler we'd used on countless Catalina runs. When Hayden and Jonas met with him and explained the plan, he didn't hesitate. Monte is always up for an adventure. After tracking wind and swell forecasts, September 7th was selected.

## The Night Crossing Begins

On September 6th, both swimmers worked their normal shifts. On breaks, they quietly prepared their water and meals. No hype. No drama. Just focus.



That evening, after work, we met at Monte's place in Dana. We loaded the Whaler with safety gear, food, and a surf kayak that would accompany the swimmers. At 8:30 p.m., we launched from Dana Point Harbor.

A west wind had kicked up that afternoon, making for a sloppy Catalina crossing in a 16-foot boat. We found the sweet spot at about 12 mph — fast enough to make progress, slow enough to keep the ride manageable. The run took over four hours.

Around 2:30 a.m., under a bright moon, we reached a rocky point just south of Two Harbors. The kayak hit the water with green glow sticks attached.

Jonas' dad positioned himself as escort paddler, whistle ready for 45-minute feeding intervals. Hayden and Jonas stripped down to their boardshorts, layered in Vaseline against the cold, and slipped into the black, 64-degree water. They climbed onto the rocks. We said go. They didn't hesitate.

## Through the Dark

For the first three and a half hours, they swam through darkness. From the boat, we watched the full moon sink behind the island. Every 45 minutes, the whistle blew. They'd tread water, eat, hydrate, and continue. At times, a sudden yell would break the silence — jellyfish stings in the night. No panic. Just grit. Then came sunrise. Absolutely stunning. With daylight came a surge of energy. Smiles returned. The ocean glowed.



What began as a grind became something bigger — beautiful, almost spiritual. The channel opened up before them. Monte and I held the heading. Around eight miles offshore, massive kelp paddies drifted by.



Continued on next page.

We couldn't resist diving in for a look. No fish home — back to business. The mission came first.



**The Final Push**

Conditions stayed near perfect all day. Once across the shipping lane, the reality hit — they were going to do this.



Hayden battled a stubborn stomach ache, but pushed through. He later swore the oatmeal saved him.



Jonas remained steady and smooth beside him. As the mainland approached and Long Beach came into view, the final challenge revealed itself: a seabed covered in purple sea urchins.



Carefully navigating the last few yards, they stepped onto the sand unscathed. 9 hours, 51 minutes. 21.6 miles. Mission complete.



They celebrated the only way that made sense — at Rosco's Chicken and Waffles. Monte and I fueled up at Long Beach Harbor, having logged nearly 100 miles on the boat that day. It was a long, unforgettable journey.



**Just Another Workout**

There's something uniquely inspiring about watching two San Clemente lifeguards swim the Catalina Channel in nothing but boardshorts. No wetsuits. No fanfare. Just commitment.



It was adventure. It was brotherhood. It was discipline carried out quietly, day after day, long before the start horn ever sounded.

In the end, it wasn't just about crossing the channel. It was about honoring the work. Just another day. Just another workout. Only this one happened to be 21.6 miles long.



# California to New Zealand: A Lifeguard Exchange

*Bridging coasts, sharing skills, and saving lives across  
the Pacific*

By Brandi White

This year's California–New Zealand Lifeguard Exchange candidates, **Andrew Mansoor** and **Brandi White**, spent six weeks this offseason visiting over 15 beaches in New Zealand's Northern Region. During their stay, Andrew and Brandi had the opportunity to become qualified Surf Lifeguards, participate in regional trainings, as well as join Clubbies on patrol.



When visiting **Waipu Cove Surf Club**, the exchange delegates accompanied a group of Clubbies on an Educational Outreach road trip in Northland, New Zealand. On this road trip, the group held educational clinics for members of the communities surrounding Tauranga Bay, Maitai Bay, and Bay of Islands–Whangaroa Ward. The purpose of these road trip clinics was to educate members of the public located in areas lacking any sort of water safety.



In each clinic, Andrew and Brandi assisted the clubbies in demonstrating different rescue techniques using an inflatable rescue boat, paddle boards, Peterson buoys, and Burnside buoys.

They taught members of the public how to utilize the public rescue equipment (Burnside buoy) in the event of an emergency and how to call for help. The clinic also provided members of the public a lecture on water safety as well as the opportunity to learn hands-only CPR.



“With Andrew and I both having years of experience being Junior Lifeguard instructors, it was an awesome opportunity to showcase our skills in teaching water safety to all the kids who came to participate! This was such a great trip, and I commend the clubbies for all their hard work and for volunteering their time to make this trip happen!” Brandi stated.



With several of New Zealand's vast stretches of coastline being unmanned by lifeguard clubs, the push to educate as many people as possible on water safety continues to be a crucial task in the goal of drowning prevention.



“Being able to apply our own Lifesaving knowledge to impact the local communities was an amazing experience. I am beyond stoked to have been able to learn new techniques!” shared Andrew.

# Strengthening Lifeguard Operations: An Orange County Regional Training Collaboration

By Gary Conwell — *Lifeguard Training Captain,*  
*Newport Beach Fire Department*

Eight full-time supervisory personnel from Seal Beach, San Clemente, Laguna Beach, Newport Beach, Huntington Beach, California State Parks, Mission Viejo, and OC Lifeguards represent a regional training collaboration focused on strengthening lifeguard operations across Orange County.



Each member serves within their respective training division and works closely with junior lifeguards, recruitment teams, and executive leadership. With most participants bringing three to five years of experience as training officers, the group combines substantial institutional knowledge and operational expertise across the board. The collaboration has become a productive forum for sharing ideas, refining processes, and improving interagency coordination.



The team meets monthly outside of the summer season to plan and schedule joint training opportunities. These meetings also provide time to brief one another on agency updates, including recruitment efforts, compensation, working conditions, operational challenges, and shared goals. This consistent communication has enhanced regional awareness and strengthened professional relationships across departments.

Throughout the year, the group schedules host-agency trainings on a rotating basis. While topics may vary slightly from year to year, several core curriculum areas remain consistent to ensure personnel can maintain proficiency and benefit from cross-agency instruction. Trainings are typically structured as half-day or extended half-day sessions (9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. or 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.) and are open to both seasonal and full-time staff. We usually get 20–30 lifeguards at each training event, and they are all well received across agencies.



Core training disciplines include:

- Vessel operations, coastline familiarization, and rock rescue training
- Dive operations (day, night, and missing swimmer scenarios)
- Beach driving
- Sand entrapment response
- Rescue Watercraft (RWC) operations, introductory and refresher
- Drone operations
- Marine indicator recognition and suspicious vessel/boat landing drills

The group is currently developing a standardized suspicious vessel/boat landing flow sheet to serve as a regional operational guideline, modeled after the shark incident worksheet implemented five years ago. The goal is to provide consistent decision-making tools and documentation practices across all participating beaches.

In addition, the collaborative has begun expanding integration with the United States Coast Guard, incorporating more trainings, helicopter and hoist operation familiarization into training evolutions to further strengthen interagency readiness.



The next scheduled training is a Beach Driving Course hosted by Seal Beach in March. Through shared instruction, open dialogue, and regional standardization efforts, this consortium continues to elevate professional standards and operational cohesion along the Orange County coastline.

# Building Opportunities: California All-State Surf Lifesaving Team

By Dan Ackerstein

In 2026, for the first time, a group of coaches and top surf racing athletes will name a California U-19 All-State Surf Lifesaving Team based on the summer racing season results. While the USLA Youth National Team has elevated the country's elite performers, the California All-State Team will provide recognition for California's best surf athletes, as well as additional training and racing opportunities. Sponsored by the California Surf Racing Coaches Alliance (CASRCA), the program fosters growth of the sport across California and the United States.

The team's mission is to select an "all-star" roster of surf lifesaving athletes from the dozens of beaches and hundreds of competitors across California each year. While the U.S. National Team recognizes only 12–16 athletes annually, many exceptional competitors go unrecognized. The California All-State Team aims to fill this gap, providing recognition, training, and travel opportunities for athletes who demonstrate talent, leadership, and commitment.

"Most sports have All-County or All-Region teams selected by coaches or journalists; even though surf racing is a relatively small sport, our athletes are exceptional and work incredibly hard. If we can provide some extra acknowledgement for the top athletes and create another goal for kids to work towards, we grow the sport and the surf lifesaving community." said former Youth National Team Manager **Casey Graham**. "Being among the best athletes in your sport in a state like California is amazing; let's give those kids a way to talk about it and put it on their resumes for college, lifeguarding opportunities, whatever they want to do next!"

The All-State Team will be selected by a Coaches Panel that currently includes representatives from Santa Barbara, LA County, Santa Cruz, Capitola, Oceanside and Long Beach. Coaches from beaches who run competitive programs and regularly attend Regionals and Nationals are encouraged to join the Panel and contribute to the selection process.

"When Casey suggested this I loved the idea immediately. These kids work so hard, and develop a skillset that's so much more than putting a ball in a basket." said **Dan Ackerstein of the Westcliff SLSC** in Santa Cruz. "More opportunities for recognition mean more kids going home happy and stoked on surf racing—this is how you grow a sport!"

Athletes will be named to the All-State Team based on performance at three major events: the South Bay Dozen in July in Torrance, CSLA Regionals, and USLA Nationals. To be eligible for consideration, athletes must compete at least one of the qualifying 'selection events'. Because the purpose of the All-State team is both recognition AND growth of the sport, selection will not be based exclusively on competitive performance. Geographic and agency-based selections will be encouraged and athlete character, commitment to the sport, and leadership will also figure prominently in the Panel's selection process. Members of the team will be invited to meet and train together during the off-season as well.

"Ultimately we'd love to take the All-State Team to Florida or New York to compete against their best athletes in the fall. And maybe even take a team overseas to compete in Australia, Europe, or Japan. The sky is really the limit once we get these enthusiastic kids and parents together thinking about the larger world of surf lifesaving sport." said Ackerstein.



*Westcliff Santa Cruz athletes Zippy Pochet, Finley Dobkin and Natasha Ackerstein enjoy the warm waters of Ft Lauderdale at the USLA High Performance Squad Training Camp in February.*

All athletes competing in the U19 division at one or more of the selection events are eligible. For 2026, qualifying events include South Bay Dozen, CSLA Regionals, and USLA Nationals. Selection is made by a panel of coaches representing California surf lifesaving agencies and clubs. The goal is to reach consensus, but if needed, each beach represented receives one vote per roster position. While competitive performance is a factor, selections also prioritize geographic balance, agency representation, athlete character, leadership, and dedication to the sport. The final team will consist of 16 athletes—eight female and eight male—roughly divided as follows: 2 Beach competitors, 2 Board paddlers, 2 Ski paddlers, and 2 Swimmers.



*USLA's Bruce Wilkie shares the finer points of forward stroke technique with youth athletes at the USLA High Performance Squad Training Camp in Ft Lauderdale.*

Members of the All-State Team will have opportunities to train together during the off-season (details TBD). Looking forward, the team hopes to compete against other state or regional all-star teams and participate in international competitions in Europe, Japan, and Australia/New Zealand.

**For more information or to join the Coaches Panel, please contact Dan Ackerstein at [danackerstein@gmail.com](mailto:danackerstein@gmail.com). The California All-State Team is actively seeking product and equipment sponsors to outfit our athletes as well.**

# California Bears Down Under

By Merrill Riley

Contributions: Jay Butki | Photos: Skip Prosser and Surf Lifesaving Australia (SLSA)

A team of California Ocean Lifeguards returned to Australia in January for the third time in two years to compete in the highly competitive “Super Surf Teams League” surfacing carnival. This year’s team, known as the California Bears, consisted of four men, four women, a team manager, assistant manager and a coach. The team was composed of some of California’s most impressive surf racers led by **Hayden Hemmens** from California State and **Holly Maine** from Los Angeles County. They both have been downunder training for the past two years and competing for Northcliffe and Burleigh Heads respectively and have garnered much success at the National and International levels.

This year the team was led by **Jay Butki**, who as the California Surf Lifesaving Association Sport Chair, has a tremendous amount of International experience and passion leading teams throughout the world. Our Assistant Coach was **Skip Prosser**, who is the newly appointed USLA Lifesaving Sport Chair who was a great addition to the team. Rounding out the team was **Merrill Riley** who has also been involved with lifesaving sport Internationally and nationally for decades.



Back (L-R): Hayden Hemmens, Bodie Addison, Isiah Hollins, Harrison Alty;  
Front (L-R): Coral Kemp, Sasha Hemmens, Holly Maine, Madalyn (Munchie) Price

This year's SSTL was held on January 10-11, 2026, back at the ever-popular Maroubra Beach in New South Wales. What makes this event so unique is it is in conjunction with Surf Lifesaving Australia's Interstates Competition and the Shaw and Partners Iron Series.

This year's competition was quite challenging due to the extreme weather patterns with large surf and lateral currents shifting from offshore to onshore winds overnight that were generated from the Tasman Sea.... These extreme conditions made it challenging for everyone and because of the dangers many events were cancelled.

While the Australian state powerhouses usually dominate the spotlight, this popular event has allowed the California Bears to become a crowd favorite fixture of the SSTL, injecting a dose of international flair into the competition.



Harrison Alty

The California Bears invitation to the SSTL was originally part of an educational and competitive exchange specifically tied to the Wieland Shield, an historic rivalry between California and Victoria that has run for over 50 years. This year we returned for our third visit, making our presence a staple of the league rather than a one-off visit.



Bodie Addison in the start of the paddle.

Competing against the world's best surf racers in the technical Australian format is no easy feat but the Bears keep showing significant improvement. While Australians are raised on the “club” system, we come from a professional “agency” background. One of the observations of the SSTL is the rapid-fire, back-to-back race format where it is more exhausting than the slower paced events in the US.

Team members admitted that while they are top tier in the U.S. racing against teams like the QLD Seawolves, and NSW Rays is a humbling experience that helps bring better training techniques and race strategies back to California.



Bodie Addison (left) and Harrison Alty (right)

One of the many highlights that continues our tradition is the Bears participation in the Nippers clinic. With 150 youth and many of the Australian Iron Series athletes assisting these future surf racers will have lasting memories and hopefully pick up some tips from the best. Many of the California Bears have experience teaching Junior Lifeguards and it showed in their creativity with the kids. One of the highlights was **Hayden Hemmens** doing a linked chain event that all the Nippers really enjoyed.



A Nipper asks for a photo with Coral Kemp at the clinic.

Following the event the Bears gave out gear, stickers, patches and pins to the overly excited children. **Madalyn Price's** experience showed as she was surrounded by many that wanted a California collectible. She used her skills to keep order and make sure everyone went home with a collectible. **Madalyn Price** is a Junior Lifeguard Instructor at Capitola Beach and she commented that, “I have lots of practice working with kids and have no problem wrangling them...it's fun for me”. She loved that they all were so cute and so excited.



*Isiah Hollins (center) with fellow competitors.*

This was my third time attending as a staff member for the SSTL and each year we have improved as a team. Though the conditions were incredibly challenging and dangerous at times the California Bears held their own against some of Australia's finest ocean athletes and continued to garner respect as top-level ocean athletes.

After Day 1, even though two events were postponed we were 10th out of 15 teams (by far our best showing). Unfortunately, on Day 2, due to the extreme surf, weather and ocean conditions, five events were cancelled. In the end we were 13th and I could not be more proud. Our team put in a great effort and some of the highlights are as follows: **Hayden Hemmens** made the podium and was 3rd in the Surf Swim, and placed 6th in the Mixed Surf Race with his wife, **Sasha Hemmens**.



*Athlete Hayden Hemmens talks in a TV interview with Ty Dowker, a big supporter of California Bears and one of our biggest fans.*

**Madalyn Price** and **Isiah Hollins** placed 8th in the Mixed Sprint Relay with **Madalyn** placing 9th in the Beach Flags.

In the Board Race, in extremely difficult conditions, **Holly Maine** was 9th. In the Mixed Board Relay, **Bodie Addison** caught a big set wave and he and **Holly Maine** were 10th.



*Munchie Price (right) in action.*



The inclusion of the California Bears is a strategic move by Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) to help globalize the sport. Bringing in top competitors from California elevates the SSTL to an international stage. It also allows Australian and American lifeguards to share rescue techniques which has been a feature of the many years with our exchange with the Victorian Lifesavers during the Wieland Shield. Finally with the Los Angeles Olympics on the horizon, these exchanges are building a bridge for surf sports to potentially gain more global visibility.



*Sasha Hemmens (left) and Hayden Hemmens (right) race together.*

## Q & A with The Hemmens

**How did you two prepare or strategize for the relay together?**

**Sash:** "We chose to send Hayden first to get us a good lead, then the strategy was for me to hold off the boys who went second."

**Hayden:** "Going into the relay, with the surf as big and breaking as hard as it was, the start was going to be most important for us to have a good result. Getting away from the large pack of swimmers and allowing ourselves to swim our own race was the plan. We knew some of the fastest men were going to go last on other teams, so we decided to put me first and have Sash anchor the relay in hopes of getting her through the break in front and ahead of the rest of the field. It gave her a chance to race bigger and stronger swimmers and gave her more room to navigate through the surf!"

**What was it like competing together as a married couple in the mixed relay?**

**Sash:** "Very special to be able to race together. Not every day you're in a relay with your spouse, and there are very few—if any—who are doing it. It's a nice reminder that you can still chase your dreams while you're married. It's even more enjoyable now that we're doing it together!"

**Hayden:** "Being married and racing together is something I never thought I would do! It's great to have my best friend alongside me to keep me accountable, strategize with, and celebrate with."

**Did being married change the way you approached the relay or supported each other during the race?**

**Sash:** "It's lots of fun doing it together for sure, but it can also be tough at times. We both want to achieve our own goals, and we also want the other to reach theirs. When we both win, it's incredible! When we both lose, we're there for each other and can brainstorm how to improve. When one wins and the other loses, it's pretty tough. You want to be happy for yourself and sympathetic for the other—or vice versa—you're sad for yourself but still over-the-moon happy for your spouse! It's a fine line to juggle, but I think we navigate it really well. We're both supportive of each other and motivate each other to be better, train harder, and race faster."

**Hayden:** "I haven't changed how I prepare or warm up for a race, but what I have done is change my mentality from a 'me first' mindset to a 'we first' mindset. Whether it's a relay or individual races, we both know that we have someone who was there preparing with us, is on the beach or poolside cheering us on, and is there at the end to celebrate and reflect on the race. Racing with my wife gives me the ultimate teammate!"

All proceeds go towards supporting the USLA National Team. Let's get our team to the starting line.

The USA National Lifesaving Team Boosters are raising funds to support the USA Lifeguards competing at the 2026 Lifesaving World Championships in South Africa.

# USA LIFESAVING RAFFLE!

**April 23, 2026**  
Drawing Date

# 2

Winners!

**★ WIN AN APPLE WATCH! ★**



Tickets: \$5 each or 5 for \$20



**SCAN HERE!**

# In Memoriam

By Jay Butki

**Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Tyler Jagers of Air Station Astoria**, died March 5, 2026, from injuries sustained while rescuing a distressed mariner from the commercial vessel Momi Arrow on February 27. An Aviation Survival Technician and Helicopter Rescue Swimmer, Jagers joined the Coast Guard in January 2022 and served at Astoria since April 2024. He was meritoriously advanced and awarded the **Distinguished Flying Cross** for extraordinary heroism. Recognized for prior superior performance aboard USCGC Legare, Jagers embodied courage, selflessness, and devotion to saving others. The Coast Guard honors his sacrifice and offers deepest condolences to his family.



**Retired Captain Scott Grigsby, Marine Battalion 300, Lifeguard Division**, died after a long illness on December 6, 2025, aged 63. He served Los Angeles County lifeguards for 37 years, joining as a recurrent in 1986, becoming a permanent specialist in 2001 and captain in 2006, retiring in 2023.



Awarded the **Medal of Valor** in 1994 for a 1992 rescue, Scott was remembered for his courage, leadership and “enthusiasm for life” by colleagues and community alike.



**Captain Lawrence C. "Larry" Cocke, 91, of Long Beach**, passed away February 16, 2026, from cardiac arrest. Born April 2, 1934, in Long Beach, Larry graduated from El Segundo High School. Larry earned a master's degree in psychology from Cal State University, Dominguez Hills. He served with distinction as a LA County Lifeguard Captain for 22 years and remained an engaged alumnus of the department. A celebrated rescuer, Larry survived being swept off the Baywatch rescue boat and left for dead during a hurricane. He once rescued a sheriff's deputy after a helicopter crash into the surf, and throughout his long career never lost a life during his rescues.



**Retired Rescue Boat Captain Dee A. Golles, 93, Marine Battalion 300, Lifeguard Division**, passed October 30, 2025, after a short illness. A U.S. Army veteran, Dee began as a recurrent lifeguard in 1952 and retired in 1992 after 40 years of devoted service. He worked alongside Myron Cox, George Wolf, Ed Perry, Bud Clark, Bud Stevenson, Paul Mathies, Dwight Crum, Tom Zahn — legendary Lifeguards who shaped the department, exemplified hard work, selflessness, and steadfast dedication. Dee leaves a lasting legacy of service, professionalism, and devotion to the public he protected.

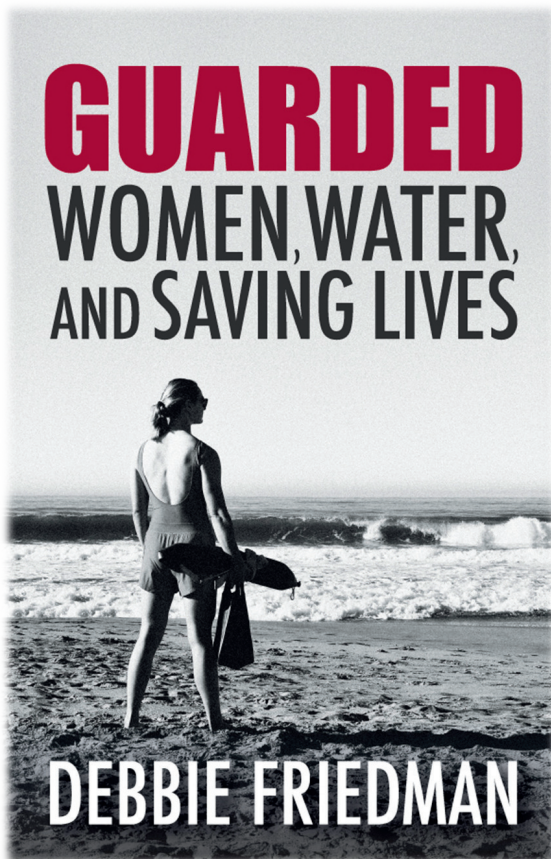


## GUARDED:

### Women, Water, and Saving Lives

By Debbie Friedman

Available at [www.toweronepress.com](http://www.toweronepress.com), on Amazon, or at your local bookstore.



On a cold, foggy morning in 1978, I stood in the sand at Huntington Beach with one hundred men. The starting gun fired. I charged into the surf — and into a new life.

Every beach was run by men who claimed the biggest surf and the gnarliest conditions. When women tested, eyebrows went up: Can she cut it here? GUARDED tells the history of the first women ocean lifeguards along the California coast in the 1970s and '80s.

Lifeguards love to tell stories. But when I went looking for stories about the first women guards, I found almost nothing. What did it feel like? What did the other women experience? What did lifeguards do when they weren't making rescues? Was it lonely? What rescues do you still remember? Did we date each other? And where exactly do lifeguards go pee?

Walking the beaches below my house with my dog Bernie, thinking about my old days guarding, I began making calls and taking notes. I set out to bring to life a generation of women whose stories were rarely told — intensely physical, exhilarating, and deeply human.

"Debbie celebrates the women who paved the way for all of us to guard California's beaches. I didn't want the book to end." —Julie Moss, Hall of Fame triathlete, speaker, and author

"GUARDED finally gives women their chapter in the renaissance of lifeguard culture — with a woman's authority. Fierce. Honest. Must read." —Drasko Bogdanovic, Founder, *The Lifeguard Project*

## A Quick Look at the Los Angeles County Lifeguards Los Angeles County Fire Department Lifeguard Division

### Host of the Spring 2026 CSLSA BOD Meeting

- **Creation:** 1914
- **Certified by USLA:** 1996
- **Coastline Guarded:** 72 miles
- **Permanent Lifeguards:** 8 Chief Officers; 21 Rescue Boat Captains; 38 Ocean Lifeguard Captains; 110 Ocean Lifeguard Specialists
- **Seasonal Lifeguards:** ~650
- **Beach Attendance:** 40+ million annually
- **Rescues:** 10,000-15,000 annually
- **Junior Lifeguards:** 4,000+ per summer
- **Facilities:** 158 lifeguard towers; 70 vehicles; 10 rescue watercraft; 7 rescue boats
- **Specialized Teams:** 40-member Dive Team, Swiftwater Rescue Team, Marine Technical Search Team

Los Angeles County Lifeguards provide comprehensive ocean and coastal public safety along 72 miles of coastline, from San Pedro to Malibu, including Catalina Island. Through a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Coast Guard, they may also respond up to 50 miles offshore when requested. The division delivers lifeguard services, emergency medical care, and specialized rescue operations to protect residents and millions of beach visitors each year.

#### Captain Ocean Lifeguard:

Captain Kealiinohopono "Pono" Barnes  
Captain, Lifeguard Services | Battalion 600  
County of Los Angeles Fire Department  
[Kealiinohopono.Barnes@fire.lacounty.gov](mailto:Kealiinohopono.Barnes@fire.lacounty.gov)

#### For Agency information:

<https://fire.lacounty.gov/be-a-lifeguard/>

#### Social Media:

@lacolifeguards  
(YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok)

#### Video Overview:

<https://youtu.be/51PK7A5Ra3Q?si=0tdMUTOJ4Vs83KxZ>

