

Photo by Eric Abma



## IT'S EASY TO SEE WHY JUNIOR GUARDS SUCCEED IN LIFE

BY PAUL WETTERWAU, SEASONAL LIFEGUARD



Junior Guards run into the ocean for their daily buoy swim.  
Photo by Erik Landry.



Jr. Guards gather around a large fish which washed ashore at Seaside.  
Photo by Chip Dorey

Guarding Monterey Sector's 26-mile stretch of coastline is too tough for just four permanent California State Lifeguards. There are sharks, rip currents, and rogue waves that can sweep entire families out to sea. That's why Erik Landry, State Lifeguard, started the Monterey Junior Lifeguard program in 1994. The program, which attracts over 200 Monterey County kids each summer, is the best shot at keeping people safe in the water.

Seasonal lifeguards help run two 4-week sessions per summer and focus on teaching life-long ocean and lifesaving skills. "People learn more when they're playing than when it's forced in their face," said Noah Greenberg, a parent who has two children in the program. Greenberg, who teaches surf lessons for a living, believes his kids are learning in ways that can't be duplicated in normal schools. "Kids tend to learn more when they're having fun. When someone's passionate about a subject that isn't mandatory, what's learned is retained. [In school] with spelling bees, you'll learn it all week; but after the test on Friday, kids tend to forget what they learned. If they use it in their writing...now, that's the real test," he said. Although the four-week summer programs involve, surfing, rolling around in the sand, and various other forms of goofing off, the program is no joke. "Although it's oriented towards fun, it has a serious nature to it. The kids are taught how to rescue victims from rip currents and learn basic first aid," said Alex Peabody, California State Parks' Aquatic Specialist. After receiving hands-on experience in the ocean, kids gain respect for its power and know when to be alert.

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As instructors pretend to be injured by using ketchup for fake blood, junior lifeguards calmly apply direct pressure, elevate the wound and laugh about how silly the situation is—but building confidence takes finesse. For anyone who knows “mouth-to-mouth” also knows nine-year-olds can be a little hard to handle as they jump around incessantly. Luckily, State Park Lifeguards see and seize unique opportunities to discipline kids. Unlike schools, which assign detentions for not behaving, these instructors assign hundreds of push-ups, long-distance runs, and even worse--require them to dive into the 50-degree ocean without a wetsuit.

When the day ends, parents pick up their exhausted children and administer praise. Some mention how their kids come home and immediately fall asleep. Due to intense workouts which involve leg lifts, jumping jacks, and yoga meditations, both children and instructors get fit. For the intellectuals of the group, lessons on skin cancer, dieting, and marine life prove the program is not just a surf camp. Guest lecturers include meteorologists, triathlon organizers, marine rescue officials and more.

With exercises that groom determined individuals, it's easy to see why junior guards succeed in life. Former Monterey junior guards have gone on to become: a lifeguard at Pipeline in Hawaii (Brian Gorrell), graduate from the California Maritime Academy (Tim Petrick); and Harvard medical school (Sarah Kennifer).

Rick Kennifer, father of three daughters who have been through the program, remembers why he enrolled them. “Two or three summers ago, we were swimming down in La Jolla and I got caught in a rip current. I was kicking sideways and I couldn't get out. My youngest daughter, Devon, 18, was in the same rip current looking for her fin to see if it would pop up. So, I said, ‘Devon, I'm running out of gas here and I've been kicking for the last 10 minutes and I can't get out.’ Then she said, ‘I think if you just put your feet down, you could probably just walk.’ She only had one of her fins and she ended up pushing me. I said ‘perfect.’ That's exactly what I wanted. I wanted my kids to be better in the ocean than I am.”



Jr. Guards do their morning stretches and exercise routine in a large circle at the Carmel Beach field trip.  
Photo by Erik Landry



Lifeguards teach the kids about ocean safety during one of the daily lectures.  
Photo by Chip Dorey