

# THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF JUNIOR LIFEGUARD PROGRAMS

Recently, the Southwest Region of the United States Lifesaving Association, now called the California Surf Life Saving Association, approved an award, for the "Outstanding Junior Lifeguard" in California. It will be presented to that individual who has met the highest standards of the Junior Guard programs as established by the CSLSA. The award will be annually presented to the Chapter from the CSLSA and the individual honoree.

As I look back over the many years of water safety, I reflect on the questions of the where, who and why did this magnificent program arise? I recall my Chief "Rusty" Williams of the Los Angeles County Lifeguards, while touring Australia in 1956 as the USA representative to the Olympic Surf Carnival at Torquay Beach, Melbourne, Australia, discussing with his Australian counterpart, Ken Watson. I recall their discussion of the Junior Lifeguard Program concept. After the International Championships, the subject was again discussed in detail with the Australian Association's President, the Honorable Judge Adrian Curlews. Years later, Australia initiated their "Nipper" program which will be addressed later in this article.

But who really had the idea of such a great program?

It has taken me a little while to trace the time frames and information from our national level and a lot of time gathering facts from the international brotherhood of lifesavers. As you can imagine, a lot of groups might wish to claim title to the concept and earliest startup. Additionally, little research has been done on this and many just assume, due to institutional pride and knowledge that they were first. So just what are the facts from history that can be verified, at least at the moment?

So let's start down this path of the History of the "Junior Lifeguards" origin.

In the USA alone, it is estimated that approximately 35,000 junior lifeguards are enrolled in beach programs nationally, each year. It has become so popular, that many lifeguard agencies have had to go to two separate sessions each summer to accommodate the demand. For the following countries, it is estimated annually and growing the following figures:

Australia	.....	50,000 Nippers
Canada	.....	3000 Juniors
Mexico	.....	300 Jr. Salvavidas
New Zealand	.....	15,000 Nippers
Ceylon	.....	900 Juniors
Great Britain	.....	10,000 Junior/Nippers
South Africa	.....	25,000 Juniors

## Part 1: The United States of America Where and when did it all begin?

In the 1910s, Tom Daley's City Lifeguard Service in Chicago was operating on a shoestring budget, even as Chicago's beaches and recreational swimming in general, became more popular. Soon there were not enough lifeguards to cover the activity. World War 1 and the great influenza epidemic had made the numbers crunch even more serious.

Leaving the Chicago's beaches uncovered or understaffed would lead to more accidents and deaths as the City just didn't have the funds to hire more lifeguards nor train potential recruits.

In 1919, Daly came up with the solution to the problem. He established a "Junior Lifeguard" corps to help patrol the beaches. The first junior lifeguards were a loosely organized group of boys who would help watch a certain area of beach, both before and during the busy hours. They would alert the few lifeguards on duty when they spotted any problems. As a reward for the service, the junior lifeguards were given trunks and T-shirts and had the opportunity to use all the lifeguard equipment for extra training. As the program grew, the Lifeguard Service Superintendent Tom Daly organized junior lifeguard programs throughout Chicago's beaches and pools with moderate success.

In 1926, a senior lifeguard named Sam Leone had forty junior lifeguards at his Rogers Park Beach area, which was the busiest stretch of beach in Chicago. Sam realized that these youngsters needed more structure than just standing around and alerting the full time lifeguards; they needed a "program" that would train them and give them the opportunity for future employment. Thus, "Sam's Boys" were born and flourished under his vision for many decades and eventually expanded to all of the beaches in Chicago.

Early stories of his youngsters rescuing stranded vessels as they practiced rowing have become folklore. The following photo of "Sam and his boys" in a long boat was taken in the early 1920's as seen below. Much of the foregoing history has been obtained from the book "Sam's Boys," written and published by Chris Serb, retired Chicago Lifeguard, about the history of Chicago's lifesaving and the legendary lifeguard Sam Leone.

## Part 2: The United States of America West Coast Origin Where and when did it all begin?

In 1927, the Los Angeles City Beach Lifeguards established the first Junior Lifeguard program in California. The group was organized and trained by lifeguard Bob Foster.

Copied from the original concept in Chicago, the Junior Lifeguard programs throughout the world have spread rapidly. It now has become the primer youth program internationally.

This was followed by the Los Angeles County lifeguards Junior Lifeguard program in 1942 at Hermosa Beach, California.

East Coast agencies later started similar Junior Lifeguard programs after the expansion of the United States Lifesaving Associations growth during the early 1970s.

As word of this magnificent program expanded, we have seen it continue to grow nationally and internationally.

There are many stories about "our family" of junior lifeguards that tell of their accomplishments and in many cases their heroic deeds which all have been accomplished by their participation in this program.

assemblies, a workshop, a professional lifeguard symposium, and several meetings. Over 100 lifeguards, employed by both public and private lifeguard corps, as well as independent lifeguards, have attended these activities.

Along with the training sessions aimed towards lifeguards, in summer of 2013 we held the first program geared towards Junior Lifeguards. This program was a joint effort made possible by the collaboration between the National Parks Company, the University of Puerto Rico, the sports and recreation department, the Department of Education, the Puerto Rico Police Department and medical emergency teams. Finally, additional workshops concerning medical emergencies and first aid have been offered to beach-goers and university students.

Understanding that education and public awareness are vital for promoting aquatic safety, USLA PR members have partic-

ipated in triathlons, swimming and surfing competitions, safety expos, and television programs with the intention of educating the general public about the importance of learning how to swim and how to escape a rip current, among other topics.

Each year, more and more people join USLA PR's efforts. The chapter faces many challenges ahead, but nonetheless, it is USLA PR's wish to promote the best lifeguard corps in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. If you wish to contribute to our efforts, please write to us at [uslapr@gmail.com](mailto:uslapr@gmail.com), or visit us through [www.uslapr.com](http://www.uslapr.com).

Acknowledgements: USLA Training Officers José A. Landrúa, Danny Ojito, Giovanni Serrano, Jim McCrady, Lucas Bocanegra, Piotr Zataroski.

Credits:

Drafting: Berliz Morales, Oliver Bencosme, Augusto Gigante

Translation: Wilmarie Cruz Franceschi

