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## Becoming a lifeguard is a challenge, but it's worth it, teens say

By Acacia Burnham

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Juniper Goudriaan, a lifeguard at the Genoveva Chavez Community Center pool, watches over swimmers in the natatorium Wednesday.

“Lifeguarding, I’d argue, is one of the best summer jobs.”

Brad Moffett pauses a moment to gather his thoughts.

The 17-year-old Santa Fe High School student is coming up on his second summer working as a lifeguard.

“It taught me ... how precious life is,” Moffett said.

“In training, you learn about all these awful things that happened [because a lifeguard wasn’t paying attention]. It makes me feel good, to know how to save people.”

Rachel Stumbo, his former lifeguard co-worker at the Casa Solana Pool, agreed. “It’s a really good summer job. Especially because you get the life skills, CPR and first aid. ... I’d definitely recommend it,” said the 17-year-old Desert Academy student.

But neither Moffett nor Stumbo has had to save a life.

“You’re preventing things from happening, and the last resort is jumping in,” said Stumbo, who describes the job as a lot of, “Please don’t run, don’t fight with each other, don’t horse around.”

Certification is considered the most strenuous aspect of the job. Most Red Cross programs require applicants to be a minimum of 15 years old and demonstrate fitness by swimming 300 yards continuously, treading water for two minutes using only the legs and diving underwater to retrieve a 10-pound brick. In addition, applicants receive CPR, first-aid and AED (automated external defibrillator) training, to earn a certification as a lifeguard.

The class is “24 contact hours of intense coursework,” said Ted Bolleter, who teaches lifeguarding, CPR and children’s swimming at Santa Fe Community College.

Bolleter, who worked as a lifeguard as a teenager before his training led him to join the Santa Fe Fire Department at age 19, said that the primary draw to the job for teens is “they’re having fun, they’re outdoors,” and that the job serves as a chance for teens to prove themselves and “show that they can take on real adult responsibilities. ... Lifeguarding can be a segue into being an EMT [emergency medical technician].”

And adolescents who train for the job learn “responsibility, teamwork, customer service skills — working with people of all ages. You’re in charge of lives from 9 years old to 90,” he said.

Bolleter knows better than anyone what it is to be in charge of lives. “Usually it’s children,” he said in regard to the individuals he’s “jumped in the pool” for. “They swim till they can’t swim anymore. Sometimes parents and adults of kids don’t realize how tiring swimming can be.”

According to the International Life Saving Federation’s Drowning Facts and Figures, most drownings worldwide occur among children 5 and younger, those age 20 to 25, and over 60, with “young children 2 to 4 years of age having a higher risk of drowning than any other age group.”

Bolleter is a firm believer in reinstating the 15-minute rest requirements for child swimmers, a procedure dating back to country club regulations of the 1950s.

“Prevention is the most important ... most injuries that happen, happen outside a pool,” he said.

Despite the gravity of some situations (and the levity of others — Bolleter is of the opinion that the primary challenge is “not getting bored”), Bolleter said, in regards to teen lifeguards, “Go for it. It’s well worth it. It’s a skill that will always stay with you, and you’ll always be able to get a job.

“There’s not a lot of jobs [where] you can hang out and get a real good tan while working.”

Stumbo, who worked at the Casa Solana Pool for two years and now lifeguards at El Gancho Fitness, Swim & Racquet Club, said that the social aspect of working as a lifeguard helped her get other jobs.

“I enjoy talking to the kids and families, especially at private pools,” she said. “You get baby-sitting jobs.”

Lifeguard Jonathan Najman, 16, likes “the responsibility. ... I love how I can step up.” He said he has learned that the most important aspect is not focusing on how many “saves” you make, but “preventing the saves.” One trait you need to be a lifeguard, he said, is “confidence. ... You [have to] assert yourself so that you can lay down the law.” And staying steady under pressure is key because, “Everything can change in a minute, and you gotta know how to react.”

He thinks it’s a sign of respect that lifeguarding is one of the few jobs that 16-year-olds can qualify for, even if it pays minimum wage.

Moffett sums up the appeal of the job best: “Unless someone is drowning, it’s not too much work.”

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