

## ON THE WATER: Waterproofing Children, Stringing Oysters

By Jo Murray

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Aquatic Capital board members Lenny Arkininstall and Scott Dixon distribute swim goggles to swim lesson participants at the Fairfield YMCA pool.

—Gazette photo by Jo Murray

### Water Proofing

Almost Half of America can't swim, a recent Red Cross survey says.

Long Beach's Aquatic Capital of American (ACOA) Foundation has teamed with the **Fairfield Family Branch of the Greater Long Beach YMCA** to help "water proof" youth locally.

The driving force behind the program is Lenny Arkininstall, who is best known as the watershed steward who has cleaned Long Beach's Los Cerritos Wetlands for decades. Trash wrangler Arkininstall said he learned of a local teenager who drowned in a stand-up board incident and thought, "We live so close to the ocean — why can't everyone swim?"

His thoughts were reinforced when he saw young people sitting ashore in Catalina because as non-swimmers, they were unable to take part in watersports.

He started by donating \$100 to ACOA earmarked for swimming lessons. Soon he learned many of the future swimmers did not own swim suits, so he worked with Y staff to provide money for those too.

The partnership Lenny started grew substantially this week, when ACOA delivered a \$2,000 check to the Y to provide swim scholarships for three classes of eight students.

The staff at the Y was able to maximize the donation by adding 2 students to each class, according to ACOA's newest board member Ryan Fox.

"I'm excited about Aquatic Capital of America's partnership with the Fairfield YMCA to assist with the Y's swim lessons program," ACOA Vice President Lucy Johnson said. "This is our fourth year of paying for swim lessons at Fairfield.

"This effort is important to us, because we know that about 69% of Black children and 58% of Latino children are in danger of drowning because they lack basic swim skills," Johnson added. "With all the water we have surrounding this city and all our water-based activities, we seek to change that in Long Beach."

Board member Scott Dixon said, "I really just want everyone to have the opportunity to safely enjoy the water. If it's playing a game of tag in one of our amazing public pools or swimming in our beautiful bay, hopefully the ACOA is making it safer for our community and exposing our kids to another one of Long Beach's incredible features.

"Who knows where our next Olympic athlete is right now," Dixon added. "Maybe one of the 100 kids we have helped make water safe with the YMCA will be a competitive swimmer, water polo player or sailor. We will just have to wait and see, but I love the positive impact we have had so far!"

Johnson summarized the organizations enthusiasm with, "Our hope is these kids learn to love the water and become future aquatic Olympians from Long Beach".

[https://www.gazettes.com/sports/on-the-water/on-the-water-waterproofing-children-stringing-oysters/article\\_b64605a2-753f-11eb-b50c-afa4496c53bd.html](https://www.gazettes.com/sports/on-the-water/on-the-water-waterproofing-children-stringing-oysters/article_b64605a2-753f-11eb-b50c-afa4496c53bd.html)

### **Stringing Along**

Last Saturday, almost 50 volunteer dock owners received foot-long strings of oyster shells to temporarily mount submerged on the docks throughout Alamos Bay, in an effort to restore Olympia oyster populations.

In about a month, boat owners will retrieve the shell strings that have a 10-inch lanyard and return them. The collected shell strings with young oysters will be re-homed into a community oyster restoration site on the mudflat in the Jack Dunster Marine Reserve, near the rowing center.

"Local residents will spot the suspended strings of oyster shells attached to docks throughout the bay. They are collecting native oyster larvae. When the oysters reach adulthood, they can filter up to 50 gallons of water a day," according to Long Beach YC's Mike Gehring, who is facilitating the on-the-water pickup.

If you missed out, sign up for next Saturday's event (Feb. 27) from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. To reserve your spot, email LBYC's Waterfront Director Chase Young at [waterfront@lbyc.org](mailto:waterfront@lbyc.org).

Include your name, boat name, the size of your boat, and contact number. Upon arrival, follow VHF Channel 68. Strict social distancing protocols are followed so organizers are requesting boat owners adhere to the reservation schedule.

If you have an On the Water story to share, email [Jo@JoVenture.com](mailto:Jo@JoVenture.com).