



Local swim coach and lifeguard instructor Beth Skudin is known as the resident surf mom in Long Beach.

Bridget Downes/Herald

Women Who Rule the Beach

Beth Skudin, matriarch of the surfing community

By Bridget Downes

"I always love to be in the water," Beth Skudin said, her bathing suit still wet under her cover-up. "It doesn't feel like work."

Beth is known as the matriarch of the Long Beach surfing community. She described herself as the "resident mom" at Skudin Surf, the popular surfing school in Long Beach, with locations in Rockaway, Nickerson and Tobay beaches.

For the Skudins, surfing is a family affair. For three generations, they have been surfing, swimming, teaching and working as lifeguards on Long Island.

Beth, 63, and her husband, Dave, surfed together as children with Beth's father, Dick Bolton, a former surfer, artist and Jones Beach lifeguard. They continued her father's tradition and shared their love for the sport and culture with their four sons, Dave, Cliff, Will and Woody.

Will is a professional big-wave surfer competing in the elite Big Wave World Tour, while Cliff is working his way up as a pro and competed in many big-wave contests. Both

run Skudin Surf, and co-founded Surf for All, a non-profit that organizes surf outings and events for people with physical and developmental disabilities, as well as war veterans and disadvantaged youth.

The Skudins have lived in some of the most famous surf spots around the world, including Hawaii and North Carolina. But Beth said she always returns to Long Beach. These days, she coaches swimming at the Long Beach Recreation Center — something she's been doing on and off since 2009, although she's been teaching swimming and surfing for about 40 years.

"You could try [surfing], and the next thing you know you're part of the surf culture, because you've fallen in love with riding the waves," she said.

Beth also helped launch Skudin Swim last year, a program at Nickerson Beach that trains, manages and hires lifeguards throughout Nassau County.

"It's a family business," she said. "It's really fun to work together like that."

She also said that she taught the neighborhood girls — family friends — how to swim, because she wanted to keep her father's mission alive.

Beth attended Bethany College in West

Virginia, where she was part of a men's swim team because a women's team didn't exist. Title IX, a 1972 federal civil rights law that protects students from gender discrimination, had not yet been passed.

"It wasn't weird to me," she said, "but college kids thought it was weird. They were like, 'Oh my gosh, how could you be on a men's swim team?' I grew up swimming with the boys."

She said the college wanted her presence on the team to garner interest from women. And by the time she was a junior, she helped create a women's team.

"It had a big influence on my life — just to push yourself and not have limitations," she said.

Beth also recalled teaching Long Beach lifeguard Meghan Gallagher — who is also featured in the Women Who Rule the Beach series — how to surf.

"I remember the day she first cut across the face of the wave," Beth said.

Whether she's coaching the swim club or teaching at Nickerson Beach, Beth puts all of her effort into everything she does.

"That's what I mean about the ocean — it brings out the best in you," she said. "It teaches you to give it your all."

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Kara and Kim, bringing yoga to the beach

By Bridget Downes

Feeling the wind in your hair, the sand between your toes and the warmth of the sun on your body. That's what you get when you attend a beach yoga session taught by Long Beach locals Kara Gumiela and Kimberly Pierson.

"It's like beach therapy," Gumiela said, "going to the beach for your healing."

What started out as a few people getting together on the beach spread via word of mouth and grew into an expanding community of yogis and reiki healers, or instructors trained in holistic energy healing.

The yoga instructors independently teach classes on the beach based on a weekly schedule posted on Instagram and Facebook.

Gumiela, 30, previously worked as a nanny for local kids. She said she got into yoga about five years ago when she decided running on the treadmill just wasn't cutting it. She started taking yoga classes at Synergy Fitness and fell in love with the calmness she felt after each session.

"After that, I was hooked," she said.

Gumiela became a certified instructor and began teaching yoga at New York Beach Club in Atlantic Beach.

"I always knew I could help people, and I knew I loved teaching children, and I was like, I want to become a yoga teacher because I want to make people feel good," she said.

Jennifer Hanono, surfer, paddle-boarder and environmentalist

By Elizabeth Thompson

"Working in the ocean has been such a positive experience for me, and I enjoy sharing that with people," said Jennifer Hanono, a surfer, freediver and stand up paddleboard expert, who runs paddleboard lessons at Skudin Surf.

Hanono, who is originally from the Five Towns, is now a Long Beach resident who has been surfing and paddleboarding for five years.

She said she has always loved the water, but her relationship with it actually started in Sweden, where she spent summers on the lake with her family when she was younger.

When she moved to Long Beach, Hanono's experience with cold, fresh water helped her transition to ocean water, and she soon found she had an aptitude for stand up paddleboarding.

"I like to think of myself as a well-round-

Pierson, 39, works as a teacher in Valley Stream and teaches yoga at Love Integration — a local yoga studio — and spends her summers leading guided meditation sessions over a backdrop of a beach sunset. She is a Reiki Master Healer, and incorporates mindfulness and pranayama breathing exercises into her teachings.

"When I went to yoga, I felt better," Pierson said, recalling when the activity first piqued her interest. "But I wanted to know more."

She became certified three years ago, and said that yoga teacher training was an experience that helped heal her pain, both physical and emotional.

"I became a different person after, when I came out," Pierson said, adding that her training came at a difficult time in her life. She was suffering from chronic physical pain and her father died a couple of days before her training began.

"My transformation was quick and fast," she said. "I didn't know when I had signed up, that that was going to be my healing through one of the biggest tragedies of my life."

The pair met at Love Integration after Gumiela took one of Pierson's classes.

They constantly encourage their students to step out of their comfort zones and try new things.

"If it's uncomfortable," Pierson said, "well, that's what yoga teaches you — how to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations."

They noticed that some people feel intimidated by a yoga studio and are more comfortable on the beach.



Kara Gumiela, left, and Kimberly Pierson lead yoga classes and guided meditation sessions on the beach.

Bridget Downes/Herald

"It's like a sisterhood, and I just feel a bond," Gumiela said.

"That's what I think yoga is — the science of balance in the body, and mind and spirit," added Pierson. "What you learn in our classes — it's not just when you're on the mat — it's what you take off the mat."



ed water woman," she said. "My relationship with the oceans has changed my life 100 percent. I am a healthier person because everything I do involves the ocean."

In addition to being active in water sports, Hanono calls herself a "steward of the sea," and she is also passionate about conservation. She is a member of the Surfrider Foundation, and she makes an effort to spread awareness about the dangers of single-use plastics like plastic straws, utensils, bags, food containers and cups that can be harmful to the environment.

Hanono also limits the amount of chemicals she uses in her daily life, and instead, she uses natural products and cleaners that get the job done without hurting the environment.

She makes an effort to spread awareness about protecting ocean life and is involved in beach cleanups organized by Surfrider.

"Once people fall in love with the water they want to protect it too," Hanono said.

Jennifer Hanono, a self-proclaimed "water woman," teaches standup paddleboard lessons at Skudin Surf.

Christina Daly/Herald

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Carol O'Neill, serving those in need

By Elizabeth Thompson

Carol O'Neill serves those in need in the community with the annual Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament, a charitable event that benefits children with cancer.

She is the executive vice president of the Michelle O'Neill Foundation, a nonprofit organization that helps children with cancer and special needs. The organization was founded in 1997 in memory of her daughter, Michelle O'Neill, who died from cancer in 1996.

"Long Beach is a volleyball town," said O'Neill. "It represents Long Beach in a good light."

This year will mark the 22nd annual volleyball tournament.

The event has grown since its inception in 1997, when there were only 11 volleyball nets and raised \$17,000. Today, the tournament has grown to include 61 nets and last year raised \$200,000. O'Neill says the event has grown just from word of mouth in the community.

"It's totally amazing, and I think a lot has to do with the spirit of the community," she said.

O'Neill said the funds go directly to the families of the children who have been diagnosed with cancer. She said that she learned firsthand how many expenses were not covered by insurance.



The funds raised by the tournament are used to help families with money for transportation, parking, wigs and even tutoring for children who have been out of school while in the hospital.

"There are so many people who come to the fundraiser who truly care," said O'Neill.

The tournament this year will be held on Sept. 8 at Laurelton Boulevard beach. There will be live music, a raffle and special visits

from the children being supported by the foundation.

For more information about the foundation and in order to register for the tournament, visit www.monfoundation.org.

Carol O'Neill coordinates the annual Michelle O'Neill Volleyball Tournament, one of the biggest events in Long Beach every summer.

Christina Daly/Herald

Meghan Gallagher, lifeguard officer breaking barriers

By Bridget Downes

"I don't really remember summers before being a Long Beach lifeguard," said Lt. Meghan Gallagher, of the Lifeguard Patrol.

Out of six lieutenants that run the lifeguards, she's currently the only female officer. There have been three in the history of the patrol.

"It's crazy that we've only had three girls as bosses," she said, adding that she oversees about 32 guards, both male and female.

Gallagher, 31, has been a lieutenant for three years. She oversees the "east crew," and also serves as the captain of the women's competition team, a group that competes in New Jersey every year. She's been a lifeguard for 15 years.

"It was important for me to have that leadership role that the girls can go to," Gallagher said. "It's really important for the girls to be able to see that a female can get into some sort of power in this place."

Out of 167 total guards on the patrol, 51 are women. She recalled her rookie year



in 2004, when there were very few girls on the patrol. Since then, she said, the amount of women on the crews has drastically increased.

When she was a rookie, there were no women in charge to look up to, Gallagher said.

"It's great to have a figure for [the girls] to go to," she said, "and be like, 'Hey, listen, this was me 15 years ago — I get it.'"

For Gallagher, being a lifeguard is a family affair. Her father, Patrick Gallagher, is the former Chief of Lifeguards.

"I grew up around it and that's always what I wanted to strive to be," she said, adding that she was always a part of a swim team.

When Gallagher isn't keeping a watchful eye over swimmers at the beach, she's teaching English to kids who speak foreign languages or coaching junior varsity lacrosse at Long Beach High School. It works, she said, because she has summers off, which allows her to lifeguard.

"It's definitely shaped the people that I'm around and the way I interact with people," she said. "It's gotten me to be patient."

Lt. Meghan Gallagher is currently the only female officer on the Lifeguard Beach Patrol.

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