



A Day in the Life of a Beach Ambassador

Richard Mason

South Florida's Beach Ambassador Program is a key factor in mentoring Haulover Beach. These volunteers spend a minimum of one day a month at the beach wearing their official teal blue safari hat and ID. In exchange for this volunteer service, Haulover Park administration offers free parking and reserved spaces in the north parking lot.

If you're interested in becoming a BA, just contact our BA Captain, Ken Tauer at ken_tauer@yahoo.com. You can read our BA Manual on line at <http://sffb.com/pdfs/BA-Manual.pdf>. After attending a Board meeting to meet us, you'll be asked to mail in your application with \$20 to cover the cost of a background check.

Training sessions are held four times a year and BAs are expected to make at least two. New BAs also receive one-on-one training by seasoned ambassadors until they feel comfortable to strike out on their own.

The goal of the program is to educate the users on naturist etiquette and help Haulover Park lifeguards and rangers resolve behavior issues in a low-key manner. Police back-up is available on request, which is very seldom necessary.

It's a great way to meet people on the beach, have some fun and help keep Haulover Beach safe.



photos courtesy The Naturist Society

Beach Ambassador Daily Log Sheet From the log of Richard Mason

Sunday, January 6, 2013

Weather: A high of 78 degrees. 15 percent chance of rain.

Sign in at parking lot attendant booth at 9:12 a.m.. I enjoy the beach in the mornings, before the sun gets too intense. Lighter crowds as well. I know other Beach Ambassadors (BAs) like the after 2 p.m. crowd the best.

I face my first conflict of the day. The parking is free for BAs so I personally saved six bucks. But as an officer in South Florida Free Beaches, I want the parking revenues to be high so that we can brag about all the money Miami-Dade County is making from the naturists. I quickly overcame the conflict by dedicating the six bucks to a six-pack of non-alcoholic beer.

I'm meeting Ken Tauer, Captain of the Beach Ambassadors, who uses the handicapped lot on the east side of A1A, so he won't know I was 12 minutes late. Actually, he's usually later than me.

With that settled I was set to face the day. Then I realized I was wearing my wide-legged British Army of Burma war surplus shorts and with my skinny, pale chicken legs protruding from the bottoms. Is this the portrait of the typical authority figure on the beach? Well, I guess it is for today.

I'm sun sensitive, so have to keep covered, although most BAs work naked with just the official teal/blue BA safari hat. The hat alone would certainly intimidate the unclothed (and sometimes the unwashed) masses soon to fill the beach. It was at this moment in time that I had a streak of police envy for their SWAT team outfits with the Darth Vader Helmets. Now, that's authoritarian!

I made a note to myself to bring that issue up at the next board meeting. Painted teal/blue, a Darth Vader Helmet would certainly make a fashion statement while sending shivers down the spine of those trying to sneak their Corona beer on the beach in glass bottles.

Arriving at the beach early, I was able to position myself where I could view visitors streaming onto the beach in unbridled enthusiasm for the opportunity to get naked again. Reminds me of that penguin documentary I saw. The penguins were wearing tuxedos rather than speedos, sun dresses, bathing suits, etc.

BAs Paul Friderich, Jr., SFFB's cognoscenti, and his girlfriend Ruth, had set up the SFFB's Information Booth and were welcoming the Haulover fans by giving out our *Guide To The Nurtist Beach* handbook and answering questions. This would be my base of operations for the day.

I prepared for the BA "stroll" by grabbing a supply of *Beach Guides* and a bottle of water and started my 1/3 mile stroll of the beach. We want people to know we're around and available if they need anything.

A big part of our job is to respond to reports of problem situations in a low key way, thus avoiding calling the police. We know that high crime stats are detrimental to the naturist beach, so we defuse situations whenever we can.



Just then a British tourist approached me to compliment me on my outfit. My beard and mustache reminded her of Captain Schweppes and it gave me a "dashing look," she said. And in my shorts I reminded her of her uncle who had served in the British Army in Burma in World War II. "A handsome man," she said. "Jolly good," I blurted out.

"What happened to your uncle?" I asked. "Oh", she said. "He was beheaded."

With the compliment of my "dashing look" swirling through my head, I threw out my chest and headed south down the beach. While most of the beach visitors are tourists from outside the area, I'm stopped by the many regulars who like to hear the 411 on the politics of the "Free Beach" situation. I'm Government Chair of SFFB, so I'm the go-to guy on that topic.

A lady stopped to ask if anyone had turned in a telephone she left in the ladies room. We checked with the lifeguards, who phoned the central beach Lost & Found, and it had not been turned in. I gave her our *Beach Guide* listing phone numbers to call referring her to the Beach Safety Headquarters number where all Lost & Found items turned in end up. She'll check again before she leaves.

The Boat Storage House issue is the most often asked question, and the beach regulars are still pissed that neither the park department or the district county commissioner never informed any beach group or citizen of the planned installation or held a "real" public hearing on the North Beach Parking lot. Mitigated arrogance is what beach goers say. I move on.

I was stopped again to be told that a guy has been putting suntan lotion on his pubic area non-stop for quite a while now. The person reporting the incident believes it was inappropriate. Since she didn't actually see an erection, there was no action to take, but I said we'd keep an eye on him, and if she did see an erection, we'd dig out our hammer and put an end to it (just kidding). Actually, we'd just have a talk with him in a way that would make him leave the beach. (Ve haff our vays!)

Soon I spotted a young lady lying on her beach towel reading a book. There were four single men sitting in different locations around her. Three were staring and one had on mirrored sunglasses pretending he was looking elsewhere. Two of them were clothed. Being my chivalrous self, I asked her if she was offended by their proximity and their staring. She stated that when she arrived there was no one around. These men arrived after she did and she was uncomfortable, but she decided to try to ignore them, afraid of a confrontation.

Looking around the beach it was still empty because it was early. I asked the men to move and informed them that it was rude to behave this way. Two said nothing and moved away. The third commented that I should "F" off and mind my own business. At that point I suggested that he leave the beach and find another since he preferred surfer shorts. He then said he was leaving anyway, but not because I told him. Mission accomplished.



The fourth man with the sunglasses had ignored the request and lay motionless. I spoke to him again. No response. I tapped my toe to the sole of his foot. “Are you Okay?” I asked.

I asked him to relocate again. He said he did not want to. I told him that he did not have to move unless we were to interpret his behavior as stalking the lady, and if so I was going to call the police. The lady stated that she would move. I said fine. She moved away and I gave her my card with my cell phone number. “Call if he returns,” I said.

The important thing to avoid is user conflict on the beach and as a BA you don’t want to be the initiator of the conflict.

Being a B/A on the beach is an important part of the dynamic of the beach. With so many first timers and single females visiting the beach, they really need to be educated about naturist beach etiquette, not because they will be a problem, but because they need to know what behavior is not tolerated on our beach and what to expect of others.

We are often told by single ladies, whether alone or with a group, that the other beaches are full of rude men and beach blanket Romeos. They find Haulover Beach to be a safer and cleaner beach. Once they know they can either look for a BA or ask the lifeguards for help, they feel safe.

From Friday to Monday, from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. we have a Haulover Beach ranger employed by the county. Tabitha works only on the naturist beach. She drives an ATV, a golf cart, or sometimes a truck, so she can answer any call for assistance from us.

She often asks a BA to accompany her as a witness when she responds to a complaint. She is very knowledgeable of the law and park rules and has become adept at recognizing situations where police back-up is needed.

Many incidents are the results of the in-flow of alcohol and the out-flow of common sense. User conflicts and complaints are usually about wind screens, loud talking, or radio. Radios are not allowed on the beach unless you bring earphones. Some reports are about glass bottles.

Occasionally we get a situation where an overly romantic couple is being overtly amorous. A gentle “Excuse me” followed by a reminder of the law and that this is a family beach, usually brings them back to Earth.

During my stroll, I greet people and ask them where they live. So far today I’ve met Canadians, Italians, four young Columbian ladies (that was a treat!), Argentinians, Venezuelans, French, Germans, and Belorussians. Chinese visitors usually arrive with a guide in a 15-passenger van, walk on the beach fully clothed, look about, and leave. We’re talking United Nations here!

The Americans come from a dozen or more states during this time of year. Lots of white butts. I’d estimate about 5000 beach visitors today. Not unusual for high season.

I spotted Miami-Dade Police Sergeant Tom driving on the beach to check in. We have his and Tabitha’s cell phone numbers for emergency situations, which very seldom happens.

The Life Guard/Beach Safety Unit is part of the county fire department and they are all trained EMTs. Occasionally people suffer heat stroke and collapse from dehydration. The Haulover Park Fire Station can have an ambulance there in just three minutes and even a helicopter in a serious health incident.

There are a lot of safety features available in Haulover Park and the Beach Ambassadors are only part of that system. The first responders to the first responders.

The last few hundred feet of the southern end of the beach has more open space and there are several location loyalists that keep an eye in that area. Reports are that this section has been quiet. No one acting inappropriately. We do have occasional problems due to non-naturist walk-ons from the adjacent prude beach.

A key part of South Florida Free Beach’s original 1989 business plan to develop and manage a designated naturist beach, was the Beach Ambassador Program. Many nude beaches have been shut down due to naturists not being organized and taking the blame for the inappropriate behavior of others with no one to speak up for standards.

SFFB is committed to saving Haulover Beach from this fate. That’s one reason why I like my role as a Beach Ambassador. It’s a way to do my part and give back to those who have been mentoring Haulover for over 20 years, making sure our visitors are treated with respect.

Another reason I like being a BA is that my hat allows me to walk up to anyone on the beach and have a chat without being viewed as a masher or pervert. I’ve made many real friends over the years. These freebeachers are a great group of people. **N**

For more information on South Florida Free Beaches and Haulover Beach Park go to their website at www.sffb.com.