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Seventh annual Save the Harbor Splash needs your help to save beach programming



The Shamrock Splash is returning for its seventh year, and this year it's for raising funds to help fill budget gaps from the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Courtesy Photo

The Save the Harbor Save the Bay (SHSB) organization's annual Shamrock Splash, organized for March 5 at the Boston Centers for Youth and Families Curley Community Center, will have a special connotation this year, as budget cuts from the state have created funding gaps in the beach programming for the organization.

This year, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) lost about \$5 million in total funds, and a lot of it came out the SHSB's free beach programming and staff.

"This year's splash is more important than ever before," said Bruce Berman, Director of Strategy & Communications at Save the Harbor/Save the Bay. "With deep cuts to DCR's metropolitan beaches budget this year, all the funds we raise will support Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Better Beaches Program to fund another great summer of free events and youth programs on the beach from Nahant to Nantasket."

Berman said the cuts amounted to a total of \$400,000 from the DCR's seasonal staffing line item, and also cut funding for free events, algae removal and other services for the metropolitan beaches around Boston.

"We're going to try to make up the shortfall on the programming money by freezing our fannies off on the fifth," he said.

Berman said last year, about 250 residents took the plunge and helped to raise nearly \$40,000 for beach programming. He said this year, they're looking to raise \$50,000.

"It's a terrific event and last year we were able to fund 40 events in nine communities and this year we hope to be able we're going to fund as many as we can," he said. "Both the (former Gov. Deval) Patrick administration and then the Baker administration were both enthusiastic supporters of the program and we hope they'll find a way to restore the cuts in '17 and if not we hope it'll be in the budget again in '18."

Berman said that the state paid about \$5 billion cleaning up the harbor and the local beaches, and to do that just to not use them for public programming would be a waste. He said the funds will help local as well as internationally-recognized events.

"It'll help support the sand sculpting competition in Revere," he said. "That brought half a million people to the beach last year, and we also have concerts on the shore in Lynn and Nahant. In Boston, it'll support family fun nights at Carson Beach and activities in Dorchester and East Boston, including campfires and family beach fests. Some of the events are small and focus for the folks who live in the neighborhoods others as I said attract half a million."

Berman said the event has always been geared towards a polar plunge-type event, but luckily it has been mostly mild during the plunge.

"Although nothing really compares to two years ago when it actually snowed," he said. "There was ice in the water, I hope we don't end up like that this winter."

Berman added that after seven years of doing the program and participating in the splash himself, friends and family always encourage him to participate.

"I'm 61 years old and this is the seventh year in a row," he said. "I've done this and the way I think about it is there's a good chunk of people who support it told me that this kind of activity could be fairly dangerous at my age, so in order to encourage me they give me money and when you think about it it's a bit perverse. Sometimes I think they're trying to kill me!"

The event will also feature Harpoon beer, food from b.good and music by the Mix 104.1 & AMP 103.3 street teams. Best dressed, biggest fundraisers and raffles from Harpoon and Jet Blue will also give participants the opportunity to win free plane tickets and swag items as well. Registration for the event is \$20. To register, go to shamrocksplash.org.

