Leadership Long Beach Aqua Fest Turns Tides on the West Side
Leadership Long Beach Class of 2015 Project Takes Swim Instruction to the West Side of Long Beach

Leadership Long Beach (LLB) 2015 is hosting an Aquatics Fest at Cabrillo High School on Saturday, April 25th to encourage reluctant swimmers to get in the water. The event will offer free swim lessons for local 5th through 8th graders with professional instructors on Saturday, April 25 from 12pm to 4pm. Kids must come with their parents to participate.

Swimming is a high intensity, low impact way to stay fit, but it’s also a skill that could be the difference between life and death; and while Long Beach is known in some parts of the city as the "Aquatics Capitol of America" some in the community have yet to take the plunge.

"If you don't swim you are missing out on tons of opportunities to have fun, earn college scholarships and qualify for local jobs. The goal of Aqua Fest 2015 is to encourage children on the west side of Long Beach and their families, who normally don’t see aquatics as ‘their thing’ to try it this summer at the beach or their local pool. Our idea is to expand some of the resources and get children excited about aquatics at an early age," said LLB Aquatics Fest Organizer, Libby Huff.

Cabrillo High School Aquatic facility, opened in 2013, features the only other outdoor pool on the west side of Long Beach. Until now the Cabrillo pool has been exclusively used by its students for an introduction to swim unit in Physical Education and the début of Cabrillo's first swim and water polo teams. After school hours the pool sits idle despite its potential for community swim instruction, regional competitions, aquatic exercise and physical therapy.

"LBUSD and Long Beach's Parks & Recreation department could expand community access to this new jewel of a pool. Aqua Fest will be the kick-off event showcasing all the local aquatics opportunities and offering sign-ups for newly expanded Parks & Rec summer swim sessions," said Dr. Elio Mendoza, Cabrillo High School Principal.

"After waiting 29 years, I finally bought my first bathing suit and learned to swim in just three lessons. I was surprised how easy it was and wished I had learned when I was younger, but as an African American girl, I never made it a priority. Finally learning to swim as an adult, I realize the impact this will have on my own children one day. I'm going to break the cycle and teach them to swim," commented Aqua Fest Organizer, Eboney Pearson.

The Red Cross says that children can become competent swimmers at age 6 or 7. However, according to USA Swimming, nearly 70 percent of African-American children and nearly 60 percent of Hispanic kids have low or no swim ability, compared to 40 percent of Caucasians. Aquatics directors at Cabrillo and Polytechnic High School concur that 70-80 percent of incoming freshmen learn to swim for the first time in their P.E. class at age 14. This cultural reluctance towards swimming has had tragic effects on the minority community. Incidents of drowning are three times higher for minority children than Caucasians.
"Aqua Fest is just the first step. Students who learn to swim at an early age are more likely to earn athletic scholarships in swimming, water polo, boating, and diving. They are also more likely to qualify for jobs like the lifeguard, boating, or local summer camps with Parks & Rec. And let's face it, there's no better way to beat the summer heat than in the water." said Huff.

Children will be accepted on a first come, first served basis. For more information follow us on Twitter @LLB15AquaFest

About Leadership Long Beach:
Leadership Long Beach was founded in 1989 by some of our community's most influential and visionary stakeholders. These founders envisioned the formation of a civic improvement program that would serve the community by educating and motivating leaders on issues important to the future and sustainability of our city. A corresponding purpose was to create a network of knowledgeable and informed community leaders who would support each other as they continued in their professional and personal areas of endeavor.