

PROFESSIONAL SURF LIFESAVER

APPENDIX 30

BY ROBIN MARTIN 21.01.2004

NAME: Brendan Evans

AGE: 22

JOB TITLE: Professional Surf Lifesaver

EMPLOYER(S): Surf Lifesaving Northern Region; lifesavers also work for private and council swimming pools, overseas surf lifesaving organisations, and as ambulance crew (with additional training)

QUALIFICATIONS: Surf Lifeguard Award (or Bronze Medallion). Professional lifeguards also undergo further assessment of fitness, ability to swim in surf, rescue and resuscitation skills

PAY: Paid work is available for 9-10 weeks a year at \$14 an hour

Career prospects: Overseas work, promotion within the organisation

Q. How does you day begin?

A. I get to work at about 9.40am and get the set-up ready; check that the rescue boat engines are working properly, make sure the [fuel] bladders are full of gas, put the radios on and start taking gear down to the beach.

Then we look at the surf conditions to decide where best to put up the flags, watch for rips and check for holes. Basically you know the beach so well you know where the rips and holes are going to occur as the tide goes in or out.

At 10am the flags go up and we begin monitoring the beach.

Q. How did you get into surf lifesaving?

A. I've always gone body boarding and when I was 14 a mate, who I surfed with and was a surf club member, said I should come along because it was fun and a good opportunity to go surfing.

I was a volunteer for two years and then when I was 16 I tried out for a professional guard's job advertised in the club newsletter. I was lucky enough to be chosen and I've been a professional guard ever since.

Q. Why is it important?

A. It's important because in summer the beach is a way of life for New Zealanders, and without me and the others there'd be a lot more drownings.

We basically help to keep the beach a safer place; we keep people out of trouble and give assistance when they do get into trouble.

It doesn't get much better than that - helping people out when they need you.

Q. What are your strengths?

A. Experience and I guess I'm a bit of a leader. I've been a patrol leader for a while now and I find it easy to communicate with the public and the other members of my team.

I'm fully qualified and have two extra St John certificates and a defibrillator certificate too.

Also, as a surfer I know the sea better than some of the guards who don't have such an affinity with the ocean.

Q. What kind of person makes a good lifeguard?

A. Someone who's dedicated, focused and calm. It is really important to be calm as we get into some pretty hairy situations. Being in tune with the ocean and being a really good swimmer helps.

Q. What do you consider a success at work?

A. Basically going home knowing nothing happened at the beach today. Every time you help someone out, that is a success.

Q. What's the worst part of the job?

A. When somebody dies, especially the first time it happens. It's an incredibly morbid feeling; you think that you haven't done your job properly and wonder what you could have done differently.

Dealing with the relatives of a drowned swimmer can be quite distressing.

It's also pretty tough when it is cold and you have to go down to the beach and watch out for one person. And unappreciative people are one of the worst things about the job.

Q. What's the best part of the job?

A. There are so many things; saving people and knowing you've made a difference, being able to go surfing on the job and generally being paid to hang out at the beach - it's a lifestyle thing. And there are plenty of opportunities to go overseas and gain experience there.

Q. What tips would you give to someone who wanted to become a lifeguard?

A. Get in touch with your local surf club, train hard and just go for it. You'll have to get qualified, but the better guards we have the better it is for the public.