



To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Committee

Date: April 23, 2013

From: Vern Jacques
Senior Manager – Recreation Services

File: 11-7143-01/2013-Vol
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Re: **Swimming Lesson Update**

Staff Recommendation

That the attached Aquatic Services Swimming Lesson Update report be received for information.

Vern Jacques
Senior Manager – Recreation Services
(604-247-4930)

REPORT CONCURRENCE	
CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER 	
REVIEWED BY DIRECTORS	INITIALS: DW
REVIEWED BY CAO	INITIALS: GT

Staff Report

Origin

Over the past year, staff received questions and comments from Councillors about how the City's aquatic lesson programming is responding to the changing demographics and evolving needs of Richmond residents. This report responds by providing an overview of the scope of current aquatic programs, with an emphasis on the swimming lesson program.

This report supports Council Term Goal – Community Wellness, 10.1

Help children and youth build healthy habits.

Background

Through the Community Services Department, Richmond Aquatic Services strives to provide for a balance of quality aquatic opportunities that respond to a variety of needs and interests of Richmond residents. A core service is Richmond's swimming lesson program, providing children and youth with valuable life skills and water safety education.

Aquatic programming opportunities provide for the following:

1. Public recreation
 - Length swimming
 - General public swimming
 - Water play
 - Fitness
2. Swimming lessons
 - Learn-to-swim programs for pre-school to adults
 - Advanced leadership instruction, eg. Lifesaving and Lifeguarding courses
 - First Aid
3. Rentals
 - Competitive swimming, synchronized swimming, water polo, diving
 - Birthday parties, group rentals
 - Special events

Minoru Aquatic Centre and Watermania provide year round access to these aquatic opportunities, while South Arm and Steveston Outdoor Pools, offer seasonal neighbourhood experiences during the summer months only.

Over the past 5 years, participation at Richmond's four pools has increased by over 47,000 visits (5.5%), with 2012 paid attendance reaching a combined total of 915,000.

Swim lesson participation is a significant contributor to the overall participation numbers for Aquatic Services. Richmond has always valued the importance of water safety education and acknowledged swimming as a life skill. This is illustrated by the ongoing high demand for swimming lessons, with overall fill rates consistently averaging 90%, which is significantly higher than other Lower Mainland municipalities. In 2012, over 3,100 swimming lesson programs were provided to 16,400 children. An additional 2,400 classes, including school board lessons, private swim lessons and advanced leadership instruction were also offered. Overall swim lesson attendance in 2012 exceeded 200,000 visits.

Total Swimming Lesson Participation					
	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Minoru Aquatic Centre	125,693*	132,716	129,114	135,954	124,804
Watermania	63,772*	65,806	64,917	65,197	53,863
South Arm Outdoor Pool	6,217	6,378	6,693	7,663	7,772
Steveston Outdoor Pool	6,108	6,169	6,357	7,347	6,491
Combined Total	201,790	211,069	207,081	216,161	192,930

*Note: 2012 Swimming Lesson participation impacted by several factors including, introduction of all day Kindergarten, School District labour dispute, and extended annual maintenance closure.

Analysis

Regular reviews of facility usage statistics, customer feedback and programming demands provide useful information for staff to effectively respond to the growth and changing needs of the community.

As a result, Richmond’s swimming lesson program has adapted in recent years to offer a much greater variety of options for participation than are typically offered in other communities:

1. One, two, three or five day a week lessons scheduled over a specific number of weeks.
 - This helps to accommodate busy family schedules, juggling to fit swim lessons in with other programs or activities.
 - The programming frequency also helps to balance the high demand for lessons with the limited space available at all facilities, throughout the year.
2. Season-long lessons (e.g. the entire spring season April to June).
 - This option provides for a consistent schedule for swim lessons over a longer period of time. Season long lessons are intended to accommodate a child progressing at their own pace through as many levels as they can within the set.

3. Combined classes for certain levels where registration is traditionally low.
 - This helps to decrease the number of potential cancellations due to low registration.
4. Private and Semi Private Lessons.
 - These lessons are intended for those who just need to improve a few skills and/or for the parent who wishes to have one-on-one instruction for their child.
5. Lessons for Richmond's home school children.
6. Preschool lessons in partnership with Community Centres
7. School Board learn-to-swim program and the Get WET (Water Safety Education Training) program.
8. Special Needs Lessons and Adapted Aquatic Programs.

Richmond's swimming lesson program benefits from two Aquatic Leaders whose priority focus is on lesson delivery, instructor development and customer service. The Aquatic Leaders monitor instructor teaching, lesson plans, student work sheets and report cards. They provide coaching to instructors, as well as assisting directly with classes as necessary or appropriate. The Aquatic Leaders also regularly review program evaluation forms, and are available to meet with parents to answer questions about the swimming lesson program.

Additional benefits and strengths of Richmond's swimming lesson program compared to other municipalities include the following:

1. Parent Swim Lesson Newsletter
 - Introduces parents to their child's instructor, and provides important information about the lessons and the facility.
 - A free swim practise pass is included with the newsletter to encourage parents to come back with their children during public swim times to practise skills.
2. Parent/Instructor Days
 - At the half way point through the lesson set, parents have the opportunity to talk with the instructor about their child's progress. Parents are encouraged to come out onto the pool deck or into the water.
3. Class size limits
 - This helps instructors keep children active, moving, progressing, and allowing for group and individual attention to be given each lesson day.
4. Pre-requisite Requirements
 - This ensures children only register into a next level after they have successfully completed the previous level. This requirement helps to allow children to be grouped with similar ability/skill level and improves the capacity for quality instruction.
5. Parent/Participant Program Evaluation
 - Parents and participants are provided with program evaluation forms to provide feedback on the programs, strengths and/or concerns
6. Continuity of instruction
 - Instructors are limited to the number of days they can be absent from a lesson set. This encourages greater continuity of instruction for the child and increases their comfort with the instructor. Daily progressive instruction and ongoing evaluation of skills benefits from the consistent instruction.

7. Lesson Guarantee Program

- Children who do not complete a level after three or more times will receive a free set of lessons. Over the past 5 years, the number of children qualifying for a lesson guarantee has gone down significantly; this is due in large part to the support the Aquatic Leaders give the instructors and the overall improved level of instruction that is now being delivered.

8. Volunteer program

- Richmond Aquatics benefits from a very large and active group of volunteers (100+) who regularly assist with lessons. These volunteers commit to assist with both regular learn-to-swim lessons, as well as the special needs program.

Aquatic staff continue to explore options for enhancing the quality of the swimming lesson program. Recent initiatives to improve customer satisfaction include:

1. Increase in the variety of program opportunities
 - Addition of more season-long lesson sets
2. Expansion of the practise pass
 - Providing incentives to encourage more frequent opportunities for practising skills between lessons
3. Instructor development
 - Initiation of instructor evaluation/feedback by the Aquatic Leaders to improve teaching skills
4. In-service Training
 - Review and reinforcement of teaching techniques
5. Increase the monitoring of wait lists, class fill rates etc.
 - Better respond to ongoing demands, opening and changing classes as necessary
6. Lessons in Cantonese and Mandarin
 - Pool lane rentals to individuals who teach swim lessons in other languages
7. Best practise research.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Richmond has always valued the importance of water safety education and acknowledged swimming as a life skill. Although families have an increasing range of leisure opportunities to choose from, Richmond's swimming lesson program continues to be a high demand service. Aquatic Services offers a variety of quality program options to help ensure children and youth have the opportunity to learn how to be safe in, on and around water.



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