

NORTH TEXAS AQUATICS ASSOCIATION

2020 Virtual Program / Special Event of the Year Award

City of Allen Parks and Recreation – Water Safety Series

The unprecedented closing of Don Rodenbaugh Natatorium during the coronavirus pandemic served as a catalyst for a unique, out-of-the-box summer preparation program: a Water Safety video series that blended bite-sized educational lessons with clever editing and writing. Our aquatics staff delivered a high-quality program that was well-received online, making this Water Safety Series City of Allen's NTAA Virtual Program/Special Event of the Year Award nomination.

Narrative

On March 16, 2020, Allen recreation facilities closed as the COVID-19 pandemic spread through north Texas communities. With this closure to the public, the Aquatics staff at Don Rodenbaugh Natatorium faced unexpected cancelations for ongoing classes, uncertainty for their upcoming programming and social distance protocols that made synergy-filled staff meetings and public facility use impossible. How does one provide recreational fitness, life-saving education trainings and the physical space to practice water skills without a facility and pool?

Aquatics staff collected their thoughts and began discussing creative ways to engage the public from afar. Their passion for education and exceptional love for Allen residents drove them toward video production as an alternative teaching tool, communicated digitally.

The Water Safety Video Series included six individually recorded videos ranging from 40 seconds to two minutes in length. Learn to Swim Program Coordinator, Katie Krout, led the content development and direction for each of the videos. While Aquatic Program Supervisor, Bryan Kelley, and Head Lifeguards, Thomas Friend, Joseph Nguyen and Garrett Frick, stepped into the spotlight as actors to visually represent real-world scenarios and the appropriate responses. All videos were produced using the aquatic staff's gifts in writing, filming, editing and most enjoyably, *acting*. No additional software or camera equipment was needed as the staff channeled inherent skills and utilized tools already available.

Each of the seven videos reviewed a safety topic typically addressed during in-person Learn to Swim lessons, private lessons or other aquatic programming. With stay-at-home orders and personal protective equipment mandates added mid-May, the videos became available at the perfect time for summer backyard pool goers who wanted, and *needed*, a refresher course on proper mindfulness around open water. The intended audience was adults and parents with small children. The conversational composition, light humor and brevity of each video made this an easy video series for parents to share with their children.

The Most Important Wearable (Lifejackets)

Aquatics Program Supervisor, Bryan Kelley, kicked off the series with some movie magic and a simple question: What is the most important item to remember when you're around the pool or on a boat this summer? A Life Jacket! To show that not all life jackets are created equal, the video highlights the U.S. Coast Guard safety sticker, something he urged parents to verify before purchasing a life jacket.

Help Someone Struggling

Bryan showed several items around the pool deck you can use to help someone struggling in the water, like a pool noodle or kick board. Thomas and Joseph demonstrated how to throw out the noodle, stay low to the ground and loudly vocalize instruction to help pull someone to the edge of the pool. The video also included several examples of the incorrect response that could cause *two* people to struggle in the water instead of one.

Using a Ring Buoy

Ring buoys are commonly found around public and backyard pools yet can be unfamiliar to most people who do not have any experience using them. Bryan dispelled that sentiment by visually showing the proper technique for saving someone struggling who is too far to reach with a noodle or kickboard. He urged video watchers to practice using the ring buoy before an emergency develops. The lifeguard team showed exactly how far to throw it, how to lower your center of mass to pull them to the edge and how to shout instruction repeatedly in the moment.

Don't Get in Over Your Head

Head Lifeguard, Thomas, joined Bryan to discuss what happens if *you* yourself begin to struggle in the water. Even experienced swimmers can develop a cramp, and new and younger swimmers can underestimate how tiring it might be to swim the length of the pool. Bryan and Thomas repeated the phrase "remain calm and don't panic" several times throughout this video to reiterate that remaining calm and not panicking is the best way to stay focused when in the moment. They suggested, if you can, swim toward the edge of the pool and hold on until you can climb out or recover. You can also turn and begin a back float to rest or tread water.

Follow the Pool Rules

The rules and regulations, commonly posted on signs around the pool deck, can be easily overlooked by all pool goers. Bringing the list to life, Bryan and the extended lifeguard team had a blast shooting common example scenarios in a humorous way. Facility rules highlighted in this video include:

- No running
- Stay away from roped off walkways
- Do not climb up the slide
- Follow the height requirements for slides

Don't Get Burned

In a cliché “public service announcement” style skit, lifeguards, Joseph and Thomas, demonstrated what can happen when you skip the sunscreen while outside in the summer. Ouch!

Diving Dos and Don'ts

The Water Safety Video Series went out with a splash! This final video shed light on the staff's favorite thing to do around the pool: reinforce the extensive diving rule list! Because the diving board and blocks see the most infractions, this video showed a mash up of Joseph doing everything *wrong*. In the last dive of the video, viewers celebrated *with* Joseph when he did not break a single diving rule – finally!

The six videos were released weekly over the summer, beginning on April 14, 2020 through May 28, 2020 as one of the most dynamic pieces of Allen Parks and Recreation LIFE: At Home Series, a department-wide resource and programming response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The videos were posted on the Allen Parks and Recreation Facebook page and on the City's website. Through Facebook insights, *The Most Important Wearable* received 1,500 views with 60 post engagements included six community shares from Allen groups and individuals. *The Help Someone Struggling* video reached around 2,300 individual view, making it the top individually viewed video of the series. Altogether, the six Water Safety Series videos received 11,400 views with a combined 636 post clicks, reactions, comments or shares.

Unexpected facility closures, canceled programming and executive mandates on social distancing could have caused Allen Parks and Recreation Aquatics staff to waiver, disheartening as the facility closure was. Thankfully, they saw the opportunity to engage with the community above and beyond the usual educational training means. Allen Parks and Recreation will continue to highlight these videos for years to come and encourage additions to the series for the 2021 summer season.

Water Safety Video Series

https://www.facebook.com/watch/147340915317152/230893851325805/?_tn=-UC-R