

# The Boston Globe

## Riding a new wave

At Quincy beach's centennial, improvements impress visitors

By Matt Carroll

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Happy 100th birthday, Wollaston Beach.

A series of celebrations will mark the centennial for the urban beach that figures so prominently in Boston history.

At 100, Wollaston Beach is looking pretty good. Millions have been spent the past few years to spruce it up. A visitor this summer will find an expanse of clean sand, sprinkled with crushed shells and small stones, stretching from the sea wall to the clear water.

That's a dramatic turnaround for a beach whose reputation was the butt of jokes for decades. It was better known for its filthy water and the trash that washed up on its shores.

It got so bad that the City of Quincy sued in the 1980s, leading to the cleanup of Boston Harbor. All the bad news kept away the crowds, even many locals, who instead pitched their beach blankets and flipped their Frisbees at Nantasket or the Cape. Crowds at the beach dwindled.

Now it's time to return, say proponents. The water is much

cleaner. There are new sidewalks, additional parking, a tot lot, a repaved road, and replenished sand, along with a host of other improvements. Over the past two years, the state Department of Conservation and Recreation has spent more than \$7 million on the effort.

But a recent visit to the beach suggests that it may still take some work to persuade would-be bathers to get in the water.

Take Kim Flaherty, who has lived in Quincy for 19 years and had never gone to Wollaston to swim. On a recent beach-weather day, a friend from South Boston, Lisa Brussard, suggested they try Wollaston rather than fight the traffic at Nantasket.

Flaherty's first question: "Do you think the water is clean enough for the kids to swim in?"

A few hours later, sitting at the water's edge, waves lapping her toes and her 7-year-old son, Coleman, on her lap, she was surprised to find the answer was "yes."

"You can see through the water and I don't think you could a few years ago," she said. "I'm pleasantly surprised. . . . I'll pass the word to people to give it a try."

The centennial is coincidental to the cleanup, but the timing helps draw attention to the beach, said Neil McCole, president of Friends of Wollaston Beach. The group, which has raised more than \$80,000 to help improve the area, this summer has held arts and kitefestivals. Scheduled for August are a volleyball tournament, senior events, and a "car day."

Doug Gutro, a city councilor who helped start the Friends group, marveled at the changes. The events sponsored by the Friends are "reintroducing people back to Wollaston Beach to see something they haven't seen in their lifetime, which is a beautiful urban beach," he said.

Technically, the centennial celebrates the opening in May 1908 of Quincy Shore Drive. But as part of the work, three beaches along the road were connected to make one long beach, said city historian

Thomas Galvin. The road originally ended at Fenno Street. In 1915, it was connected to Furnace Brook Parkway.

A decade ago, the beach was much worse than other urban beaches, but its water quality is far better now because of work by the state and city, said Vivien Li, executive director of the Boston Harbor Association, a nonprofit environmental watchdog group. The city fixed leaking pipes and illegal hookups.

"We're not there yet, but we've made significant progress," she said.

State testing figures show the quality has steadily improved. With daily testing, the number of swimmable days was more than 90 percent the past two years. The percent was down early this year because of a high number of rainy days, which increases runoff.

Slowly but surely, the improvements are winning converts. On a recent weekday afternoon, smatterings of sunglass-wearing bathers lounged on beach chairs or blankets, soaking up the rays or thumbing through novels. In the water, three young boys played with buckets and squirt guns.

The wide concrete sidewalk, recently finished and ready for its first full summer of use, was host to moms and dads pushing babies in strollers, bikers and joggers of all ages, and shirtless young males flaunting tattoos. Others relaxed on the sea wall, eating fried clams from Tony's or the Clam Box across the street.

"They've done a great job on the walkway," said 82-year-old Tom Sullivan, sitting on the sea wall wearing a Red Sox cap. The beach looks better now than it did when he was a teen, he added.

Cailin Doody, 26, was at the beach for one reason only: "I

came to tan," said the three-year resident of Quincy.

But it's also a nice area for walking, she said, and, "the water is a lot better than it used to be, too."

Terry Nixon sat at a picnic table in the enclosed tot lot across the street from the beach, watching over his 4-year-old son, Max.

He said that when he bought a home in Wollaston three years ago, "I absolutely fell in love with this place very quickly. The people are pleasant and you can't beat the water. I christened this the little golden corner because it's in its own little world."

On this day, he had cycled along the beach, bought clams for lunch, then stopped at the tot lot.

"That should make a great day right there," he said with a grin.

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The schedule of summer events can be found at [wollastonbeach.org](http://wollastonbeach.org). ■

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