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OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC # 041-2008

LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor Matti H. Bower and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: January 31, 2008

SUBJECT: Spring Surf Camp for Children with Autism

In an effort to provide innovative community recreational programming for children with disabilities, our Miami Beach Parks and Recreation Department will be conducting a special Surf Camp for youngsters with autism during the upcoming Spring Break 2008.(March 31-April 4) in cooperation with the University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UM-NSU CARD). The idea to implement this program in Miami Beach was created by the Parks & Recreation Department in the fall of 2007 after viewing a similar camp in California.

There will be 10 campers, 11-15 year olds with high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome, recruited from the nearly 2000 constituents of UM-NSU CARD in Miami-Dade, with priority given to Miami Beach residents. The UM-NSU Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, a division of the University of Miami Department of Psychology and Nova Southeastern University's Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders, is a state-funded resource and support program dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with autism and related disabilities including deaf-blindness and pervasive developmental disorders.

UM-NSU CARD provides free programs, services and research initiatives for nearly 4,000 individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals who serve them throughout Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe Counties. Services include individual family support services, education for parents & professionals, community outreach, psychological & behavioral services, programmatic technical assistance/consultation and adult/transition services.

Dr. Michael Alessandri, Executive Director & Clinical Professor of Psychology at the University of Miami was contacted by our Parks and Recreation Department in the fall 2007 in order to help formulate the plans necessary for the Spring Surf Camp. Dr. Alessandri's clinical team will train and educate our recreation division pool lifeguards assigned to the camp in such areas as autism symptomatology, behavioral characteristics, learning styles, and effective intervention strategies. Several of Dr. Alessandri's staff will also be onsite to lend technical assistance and clinical support while camp is in session.

The Parks and Recreation Department has formulated a lesson plan in order to provide the campers with a fun and educational experience. The campers will be evaluated on swimming skills, learn basic oceanography and meteorology, learn the fundamentals of open water surfing at South Pointe Park and learn snorkeling skills to explore marine life in the shallows of the jetty on the north side of Government Cut.

JMG/RCM/KS/JM/jm

c: Robert C. Middaugh, Assistant City Manager
Kevin Smith, Parks & Recreation Director
Julio Magrisso, Assistant Parks & Recreation Director