

## Tending To Miles Of Unmonitored Beachfront, Coastal Steward Offers To Rally Army Of Volunteers



Captain David Johnson, director of Coastal Steward, offered his organization's services to the East Hampton Town Board during their April 21 work session. Coastal Steward cleans up beaches on Long Island through a volunteer and sponsor program, with a 10 percent kick-back to the municipality for their cooperation. *Photo by Aaron Boyd*

**East Hampton** - As residents here continue to juggle the seemingly intractable dichotomy between caring for the environment and making municipal ends meet in an economy that sputters its way to spring, once in a great while a good notion comes along. Proposing a "win-win" solution to address the clean-up of untended beachfront, Captain David Johnson of the firm Coastal Steward, has a cost-effective plan to engage volunteers to pitch in for the cause.



The Village of Port Jefferson sponsors annual beach clean-ups with Coastal Steward, the only municipal sponsor on Long Island. *Images courtesy of Coastal Steward*

Coastal Steward, a non-profit 501(c)(3) incorporated by Johnson in 2005, organizes adopt-a-beach and sponsor-a-beach clean-up programs for municipalities. Johnson solicits local sponsors from the community, applies for the necessary permits, pulls together an army of volunteers and provides the training and equipment necessary for a day of coastal restoration, as well as a 10 percent kick-back for the town. In exchange for 10 percent of the sponsor's donation and newly groomed beaches free of debris, the town provides a dumpster for the clean-up and a sign giving recognition to the sponsors who signed up with Coastal Steward to spearhead the effort, similar to signs seen along Route 27's adopt-a-highway program.

Captain Johnson introduced himself and his organization to the East Hampton Town Board at their April 21 work session and placed his services and volunteers at the disposal of the town. Johnson generally collects approximately 30 local volunteers from community organizations and scout groups to tackle sections of beachfront approximately half a mile long by 50 feet wide. "It's a win-win for everybody," Johnson contended, "including the environment for a change."

Sponsors can be corporations looking to advertise through goodwill or private residents who are willing to reach in their pockets to ensure that a certain beach is maintained. Participants can adopt a beach for annual cleaning or sponsor a beach for a year. Sponsorship rates range from \$750 for a one-time clean-up to \$1,000 for a twice a year treatment. "The sponsor comes down for the photo-op and if they want to roll up their sleeves - great! The more the merrier," Johnson explained.



Jones Beach Clean-up May 2008 - Forty-five volunteers removed over a ton of debris from a mile of Jones Beach by the Coast Guard Station/Boat Basin in May 2008.

The Town Board took to Johnson's proposal almost immediately and asked him to speak with Director of Parks and Recreation Bob Rodgers about the areas most in need. Johnson prefers "going to non-bathing beaches," he claimed, with the goal of "getting to beaches that have never been cleaned."



Volunteers of all ages helping to clean-up Mount Sinai Harbor in March 2008. Cleaning a half-mile by 50-foot stretch of beach takes about 30 volunteers according to Johnson.

“If it's coordinated through the Parks Department it can't hurt,” Councilman Pete Hammerle reasoned, “It can only help.”

“This is not a scheme, it's not something you want to try,” Councilman Brad Loewen asserted, citing Johnson's 19 years working in environmental remediation. “We hope you're going to be a busy man.” The Town Trustees, the governmental body charged with protecting East Hampton's waterways and coastlines, were involved in the preliminary discussions with Johnson prior to the April 21 work session, according to Loewen, and expressed their approval as well.

For now, Coastal Steward is manned entirely by volunteers, though Johnson has applied for a \$2.5 million federal grant through the stimulus package that, if secured, would allow him to continue this work full-time. Along with the adopt- and sponsor-a-beach programs, Coastal Steward is also an integral part of shellfish restoration projects in conjunction with the Town of Brookhaven and the educational program Coastal Steward Investigations (CSI), which teaches students to analyze debris found during beach clean-ups to determine the major sources of pollution.

*Persons interested in sponsoring a beach clean-up or wishing to volunteer their time can contact Captain Dave Johnson at 516-946-6560 or by email at [CoastalSteward@optonline.net](mailto:CoastalSteward@optonline.net).*