

## Summer Season sees Swells

Corpus Christi is considered the summer's 'hot' coastal commodity. Despite the Coastal Bend experiencing one of the worst droughts on record, the beach, the city's major attractions and hotels are seeing their summer attendance and admissions income soar, surpassing last year's numbers.

Sales of beach parking permits are up 9,000 this year over 2008's total sales, according to statistics provided by the City of Corpus Christi's Parks and Recreation Department. So far in 2009, 110,000 beach parking permits have been purchased. In 2008, a total of 101,000 were sold the entire year.

"We have surpassed last year's total sold ON THE beach itself," said Michele Thomas, the city's beach, cultural services and events superintendent. "Last year, we sold a little over 17,000 total. This year, we surpassed that in May."

But when visitors come, they don't come just for the beach. Better beach numbers is good news for all Corpus Christi's attractions, many of which are up in attendance and sales.

The Texas State Aquarium's statistics show an overall increase of 28 percent in attendance compared to last year with the most impressive growth being in visitors from San Antonio, up 52 percent, the Rio Grande Valley, up 155 percent, and tourists from Mexico, up 163 percent. Aquarium CEO and President Tom Schmid said this July is their best July since 1991.

Next door, at the U.S.S. Lexington Museum on the Bay, their statistics show similar results with a visitor increase in July up 15 percent compared to last year. This July is considered the Lexington's highest attended July in nine years, said Marketing Director Sandi McNorton.

The South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center also saw staggering jumps this year with a 47.1 percent increase to date in admissions income and a 30 percent increase to date in gift sales compared to last year, said Botanical Gardens Executive Director Michael Womack.

"Despite the heat, we are still doing fine for an outdoor attraction," Womack said.

The Corpus Christi Hooks is another outdoor attraction that saw an increase this summer with in-stadium attendance up slightly, said General Manager Michael Wood.

The same can be said at the Art Museum of South Texas. Despite ongoing construction near their front door, the Art Museum's attendance jumped 9 percent from July 2008 to the same month this year, according to Cynthia Anderson, coordinator of community services.

Even at hotels, sales are up. This July over last, the Omni Corpus Christi Hotels saw a 12 percent increase, according to Paulette Kluge, director of sales and marketing.

So grab the family, a beach pail and of course, some sunscreen and head to the sandy shores to let the summer continue in Corpus Christi where we've got Beaches Plus a Whole Lot More!