

Tourism panel will pay share for beach 'rake'

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FLORIDA TODAY

The Brevard County Tourist Development Council unanimously voted to share the cost of beach cleanup equipment with the cities of Cocoa Beach and Cape Canaveral, which hope to buy a mechanical beach "rake."

The rake, which would be used to clean trash off the beaches from November through February, costs each of the three entities \$27,227.

The Tourist Development Council's share of the money comes from its beaches fund within the Brevard County "bed" tax. The bed tax is a 5 percent tax charged to those who stay in hotel or motel rooms in the county.

"We've been working on this idea for about a year," Cocoa Beach City Manager Chuck Billias said. "The big issue is getting the cigarette butts, and we selected this particular piece of equipment from among three companies. We selected the best of the three."

The approval of the Tourist Development Council is pending presentation of a letter that shows a working agreement between Cocoa Beach and Cape Canaveral, which will share the rake during the months it is permitted to be used.

It is not permitted to be used year-round because of environmental restrictions, such as nesting sea turtles.

- **Funds for mammal stranding program:** The Tourist Development Council also voted unanimously to donate \$25,000 to the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute toward the Hubbs-SeaWorld Marine Mammal Stranding Program.

The funds help the rescue teams get dead animals like whales and dolphins off the beaches. The money donated would go toward taking animals off the beaches of Brevard County.

"This is very significant," said Duane DeFreese, vice president of Florida research for the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute. "We're grateful that the Tourist Development Council recognizes that this issue impacts tourism directly. We believe in good science first and efficient response to strandings."

- **Council changes:** The Tourist Development Council also voted in Titusville City Council member Walt Johnson as its chairman for 2008, replacing Randy O'Brien.

Bob Baugher, owner of Cocoa Beach Surf Co., was voted vice chairman.

Ron Jon Surf Shop Director of Marketing Heather Lewis was voted to replace Bill Bieberbach on the Tourist Development Council board.

Bieberbach recently left his position as vice president of corporate development at Ron Jon, and was named corporate development officer for a Winter Park-based company called AquaFilter.

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