



Media release
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Safe swimming at pools this summer

Saving lives is on the radar for one Selwyn local as part of her lifeguard role at the Selwyn Aquatic Centre.

18 year-old Birgit Martens of Rolleston has been a qualified lifeguard for almost two years. Originally working at the Burnham pool, Ms Martens now hangs her whistle and walkie-talkie at the Selwyn Aquatic Centre.

“I have been here since the centre opened in June last year and I love the team environment this pool has. The lifeguards and pool staff work really well together to make sure this is a safe and enjoyable place for people of all ages to swim,” she says.

“While it is a fun role to take up, there is a lot of behind the scenes work and training that goes on which people often don’t think about. On one hand there are the monthly trainings for rescues and spinal injuries we have to do, but there is also the cleaning, water testing and of course providing excellent customer service,” says Ms Martens.

She says the most challenging part of her role is the pressure to perform. “Everyone is watching that I do my job right so I am always aware of what is happening around me. But I don’t think of being a lifeguard as just a job – for me it’s about helping the public and giving back to my community,” she adds.

This month Birgit Martens performed her first water rescue after two young girls came off an inflatable slide in the main pool. One was a competent swimmer but the other was not. “It all happens very quickly but you have to assess the situation and act accordingly. In this case I could see what was happening so pulled them out, radioed my Team Leader and together we helped the girls to safety,” says Ms Martens.

In the Selwyn district there are five community pools. Darfield and Southbridge pools have lifeguards who are part of the Selwyn Aquatic Centre training programme. The Council also provides advice and support to pools in Leeston, Prebbleton and Sheffield through grants.

The Selwyn Aquatic Centre employs 28 lifeguards and pool staff in both part-time and full time roles. Since the pool opened mid-last year there have been a couple of water rescues. “Unfortunately at times some swimmers overestimate their ability and need assistance from us. We watch everyone’s ability and if children seem out of their depth we encourage them to stay in shallower water,” says Ms Martens.

On the whole, Selwyn residents are generally good swimmers with pool safety awareness, says Ms Martens, however the pool occasionally experiences problems with children being left unsupervised who can act in unsafe ways or create problems for other swimmers. “We want the pool to be a safe and friendly environment for people to visit,” adds Ms Martens.

Education is key when it comes to swimming and there are several things children and adults need to know before they take a dip.

Pool safety tips:

- Ensuring safety in the pool is a joint effort between the lifeguard and the parent
- Under 5's must be in the water with a parent at all times and kept within arm's reach
- Adults should actively supervise children if they are under the age of 8
- Although you don't have to be in the water with your children over 8, you should keep an eye on them and be able to help if required – children are often very excited to be at a pool and left unsupervised, they can engage in unsafe behaviour
- Even strong swimmers can get overwhelmed, especially when distracted by playing with a buddy
- Both adults and children need to be aware of their skills and limits in the pool
- If in doubt, stick to shallower areas.

The Selwyn Aquatic Centre is accepting registrations from anyone interested in becoming a lifeguard. Please visit the council website for more information and to apply online. For opening hours at the Selwyn Aquatic Centre see www.selwyn.govt.nz/sac

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