

## A Strange Summer at the Beach for Thomas Adams and Maintenance Crew

**Thomas Adams** received an unusual call when he arrived to work early one morning last June that set the tone for a series of surprises that would continue through the summer:

First, the combination of an offshore tropical storm and high tide had caused a huge swell overnight that wreaked serious havoc on [Capistrano Beach](#), one of 11 sites the South Coastal Operations maintenance division of OC Parks cares for. The series of massive waves had demolished portions of the sidewalk, completely sunk all of the fire pits into the sand and thrown giant rocks from the sea onto land.

When I arrived on the scene, there was a man sitting on a bench that had been tossed more than 30 feet from where it was normally located, just enjoying the view,” Thomas recalled. “It was one of the many extraordinary sites my team has taken in these past few months.

You may have read about some of the [strange happenings](#) at our local beaches over the summer. Or you may have made yourself part of the story by taking a selfie with the thousands of red crabs that turned the coastline crimson. But Thomas and the 15 maintenance workers and groundskeepers he supervises were working hard behind the scenes to ensure that the high quality of these public facilities remained as unaffected as possible.

His staff conducts thorough inspections of places like [Aliso Beach](#), [Dana Point Harbor](#), [Salt Creek Beach](#) and [Thousand Steps Beach](#) each morning to clean, improve, and/or repair the restrooms, drinking fountains, showers, shelters, drains, creeks and outlets. But increased ocean temperatures altered the normal migration patterns of some marine creatures, creating new and sometimes challenging jobs for the crews.

“It’s been sad at times,” Thomas said. “We’ve had to bury deceased baby seals and even a large whale in the sand after their food supply migrated off its regular course and the animals starved. But it’s also been amazing. From my work station, I’ve seen some beautiful whales splashing their tails around that usually don’t come this close to shore. And the crabs were fun, until they started to smell.”

Thomas joined the County nearly 23 years ago as an extra-help park attendant at [Featherly Regional Park](#) in Anaheim, and



Thomas Adams

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earned full-time status as a permanent groundskeeper at Carbon [Canyon Regional Park](#) in Brea. He credits the mentoring he received by two outstanding supervisors at [William R. Mason Regional Park](#) in Irvine, where he was promoted to maintenance worker, for helping him to master the computerized maintenance management program that he uses today at Dana Point Harbor to schedule and monitor the work of his crew.

And though the extraordinary summer has drawn to a close, scientists have predicted a peculiar winter to come with potential heavy rainstorms brought by a strong El Niño weather pattern. Thomas and team are already preparing with sandbags and straw wattles to prevent mudslides and erosions.

“It’s always exciting,” he said with a smile. ■



The paved parking lot, which provides enough spaces for 140 vehicles at Capistrano Beach, was covered in rocks and sand -- and temporarily housed a displaced bench or two.



Red tuna crabs washed ashore throughout Southern California beaches last June.