



Castle in the Sand Hotel Hosts 14th Annual Surfers Healing Camp - Riding Waves of Joy in Ocean City



The 14th Annual Surfers Healing Camp will take place on the beautiful beach in front of Castle in the Sand from August 13-14, 2024. This heartwarming event is set to bring joy and unforgettable experiences to children with autism and their families, as professional surfers from California, Hawaii, and beyond take to the waves to share their passion for surfing.

Surfers Healing Camp is a unique opportunity for children with autism to experience the therapeutic benefits of surfing. With fifteen professional surfers, including legendary figures, like Israel “Izzy” Paskowitz, co-founder of Surfers Healing, the event is dedicated to helping hundreds of campers with autism, find their balance on surfboards to ride the waves, standing (or kneeling) proud in the ocean. The camp’s mission is simple: “every child deserves their moment in the sun.”

Surfers Healing was founded in 1996 by Izzy Paskowitz, inspired by the calming effect surfing had on his son with autism. Since then, the camp has expanded nationwide, offering thousands of children the opportunity to experience the confidence and tranquility that surfing provides. In 2024, the camp made stops in New Zealand, Mexico, and California. After Ocean City, Maryland, organizers will continue to Virginia Beach, North and South Carolina, New Jersey, and New York.

After Woody German, an Ocean City summer regular, volunteered at the Virginia Beach and New Jersey camps and experienced the impact the camp and riding waves together had on children with autism and their families, he played a pivotal role in launching Surfers Healing in Maryland.

“I was like, we have to bring this to Ocean City.” said Woody German, co-director, Surfers Healing in Ocean City. “I was on the outside looking in and felt so fortunate to be a part of this world. The ocean really is magic.”

Thanks to his efforts and the support of co-director Kat Trammell, who has a personal connection to the camp, Ocean City has become a treasured stop on the Surfers Healing tour.

“We attended the camp for the first time in Belmar, New Jersey when my son was four years old,” said Kat Trammell, co-director of Surfers Healing in Ocean City. “Now he is twenty. He is on the spectrum and non-verbal and as a parent, the experience was amazing. Even more

powerful was the progress he made after camp. He was in a speech therapy session and spoke for the very first time. He said, “water” and “surfing.” It brought his therapist to tears.”

This milestone sparked Trammell to reach out to the organization to find out what she had to do to bring Surfers Healing to Ocean City.

“They said I needed to raise a specific amount of money, handle the permitting and provide boards and free lunch for the campers and their families. I said to Woody, you have been volunteering with this camp and this is my first time, so do you want to help me out?” Along with partners Kelly and Dale Loeser and Ali Hoffman, the very first Surfers Healing camp in Ocean City was brought to life.

The permitting process took an interesting turn when Kat discovered Castle in the Sand Hotel had special permission to host events on the beach between 37th and 38th Street. Permission was granted without hesitation, and one year later, Surfers Healing set up camp in Ocean City, Maryland. The first camp served seventy-five kids and their families. Fourteen years later, the camp has grown to accommodate two hundred campers, with a waiting list of six hundred and growing.

“When new families arrive, we don’t know where they are in their autism journey, but the beauty of this camp is that it’s a place free of judgment,” added Trammell. “I see it as a yearly family reunion. Despite our busy lives with our children, we come together at camp to reconnect and watch the kids grow.”

“Whether you are here for the day for the first time or the fourteenth time, whether you are the child, the family, a volunteer or spectator, it’s a transformative experience and absolutely heartwarming,” said Patricia Smith, event coordinator for Castle in the Sand. “Hosting the Surfers Healing Camp is a privilege for us, as it transforms our beach into a place of joy, courage and incredible community spirit.”

Dave Leiderman, another co-organizer of Ocean City’s camp was introduced to Surfers Healing in 2011.

“My son has autism, and I heard about it from another family,” said Leiderman. “He started attending when he was ten years old and while he was used to spending time on the beach, the best part for him was when he got out of the water, took off his life vest and started high fiving all his friends. These kids may have never played a sport in their entire life, but this shows them that they are capable.”

Tommy Vach, President of the OC Surf Club, emphasized the transformative impact of the camp. “These surfers are nationally recognized and travel with the program all year long. They bring tremendous joy to the kids, lighting up their faces as they ride the waves. Surfers Healing is a testament to the dedication of its organizers and volunteers.”

The event will feature activities for the entire family, including arts and crafts, music, volleyball, and a movie night. It is not just about surfing; it is about creating a supportive community where parents can connect, and children can thrive.

The camp is supported by generous donations from The Council of Baltimore Ravens, American Legion, and HMRA. Local businesses have also rallied to provide food, water, and other

necessities for the event. If you are interested in supporting or donating to the event, please contact Patricia Smith at 410/289-6846.

Event Details:

- **Date:** August 14, 2024
- **Location:** Castle in the Sand, 3701 Atlantic Ave, Ocean City, MD
- **Opening Ceremony:** 8:35 AM, featuring a traditional Hawaiian prayer, first surf time is 9am
- **Activities:** Surfing sessions, arts and crafts, music, volleyball, movie night, and more
- **Vendors:** Changing the Lives of Children with Autism (CLCA), National Therapy Center and Pathfinder for Autism
- **Community Support:** Food donations from Dough Roller, Bull on the Beach, Black Diamond Catering, Panera, and Wawa
- **Special Guests:** fifteen professional surfers, including Izzy Paskowitz, and volunteers from the Ocean City community.

Spectators are welcome to join and witness the magic unfold on the beach. As Woody German beautifully put it, "The ocean really is magic."

For more information visit <https://www.facebook.com/surfershealingocmd>.

