

The one who Shook up City Beach

By Hannah Combs
for his town's cool waters. He
and Chris Corpus
Special to the Reader
cobbled together monetary do-
nations and marshaled volun-

teer labor to create the first city

bathing beach.

Young Vernon Shook didn't After motorists learned of let anything stand in the way the new amenities, Sandpoint of his ambitions to become an became known to have the best engineer or doctor — not even bathing beach in the Inland the Great Depression. Northwest, complete with a Upon graduating from fine bath house. It evolved Sandpoint High School, he from a seasonal gathering place took on dozens of jobs to raise for the Kalispel to a part of the money for college. One was Northern Pacific Railroad land a short stint as a lifeguard at grant, and it was eventually the Natatorium (indoor pool) conveyed to the city of Sand- in Wenatchee, Wash. The next point for the express use of a summer, in 1932, he came public park.

back to his childhood swim-Periodic improvements took ming hole and had a vision place over the next few years, that would change Sandpoint but in 1939, a major renovation forever.took place thanks to financial

Up to that point in time, assistance and labor through locals waded in the shallows the Works Progress Adminis- around City Beach after the tration. The entire beach area spring floods, cleared out drift-was dredged to fend off the wood and danced around sub-impact of flooding. Submerged merged logs that had escaped logs were removed, sand was during log drives. Drownings bulldozed onto the beach to occurred at the south end of raise the land height, and the sandy area where the river houseboats were removed and started because of the swift demolished under guard of the current. The most notable was sheriff. In addition to the bath the young daughter of a local house, a formal garden and ar- tribal chief. Some say that was boretum were designed, as well the beginning of the end of the as a broad promenade. annual summer Salish gather-The 1948 flood decimated ings.the park and its improvements,

Shook's vision for City and prompted the building of Beach included a safe swim-Cabinet Gorge and Albeni Falls ming area, lifeguard training, dams. The Sand Creek outflow swimming lessons for children was rerouted for the safety of and a picnic area for all resi-beachgoers, and more dredging dents to enjoy. His exuberance for an improved boat marina also included a 12-foot tower provided some of the fill need- so lifeguards could see all the ed to raise the land area even swimmers, and — of course — higher. take a periodic high dive into After Shook's impassioned the deep waters.efforts to create the first public

The city leaders were beach area, he credited the peo- hoping to entice tourism based ple of Sandpoint for providing on car travel, so they jumped much of the volunteer labor to at Shook's proposal. It helped make it what it is today. The that he was willing to do all of Lions Club headed the main the work and be paid a pit-modern improvements — most tance; but Shook had a passion notably the barbecue pavilion



and the club's Fourth of July events centered on the beach. Today, thank goodness, the lifeguards continue their fine work. As for Shook, he went on to have a long career in social work, and was assigned by the United Nations as chief of the Displaced Persons Program in Rome following World War II. Even off the beach, he was still helping struggling people find their way safely home.

Thanks to the Bonner County Historical Society for this story.

Top: An old map of Sandpoint City Beach. Right: Vernon Shook was beach manager at Sandpoint City Beach in July 1932 when this photo was taken during a water safety program. Shook is kneeling at left of circle. Photos courtesy Bonner County History Museum.

