

Treasure Island webcam gives surfers, tourists a look at waves

By Jennifer Rich, Times Correspondent
Thursday, October 30, 2014 5:01pm

TREASURE ISLAND — The Suncoast Surf Shop isn't answering nearly as many phone calls these days, but that's a good thing, says manager Joanna Braddock.

"The phone has stopped ringing for wave reports and we aren't driving down to the beach three or four times a day to check," she said.

Thanks to a webcam recently installed on the city's Sunset Beach pavilion, paddle boarders and surfers now use the Internet to check out surf conditions in real time as a camera pans across a section of beach in front of the pavilion. Internet users can go directly to sunsetbeachflsurfcam.com or connect through the surf shop's website at suncoastsurfshop.com.

When Braddock proposed installing a webcam in March, saying it could give the city more exposure to would-be visitors, the City Commission agreed to a six-month trial.

"We are getting great feedback," she said. "It's great for those up north who look at it and say, 'Shut up, let's get out of here.'"

Claudia Klenke, the owner of Delacado motel on Sunset Beach for 16 years, is a big supporter.

Her mom-and-pop, 12-unit motel is on Bayshore Drive, only a two-minute walk from Sunset Beach.

"People feel this is their home away from home so when they are feeling homesick, they check the website and start counting the days," she said.

The Delacado gets lots of international visitors, especially from Germany and the United Kingdom. She thinks if the webcam was promoted more by the city it could be an asset for increasing visitors to small businesses like hers.

She plans to provide a link to the webcam site on her website.

Braddock is hoping local businesses will decide to advertise on the site, which she said will help recoup the \$4,000 cost of the camera and annual maintenance. In the meantime, she said they can link to the real-time camera site for free.

City commissioners initially had concerns about potential privacy issues caused by the webcam.

But Mark Santos, information technology director for the city, said those concerns have been addressed and he is pleased with the way the webcam is operating.

"With the parameters that have been set up for the camera, people are truly looking at surf and not the people on the beach," he said. Specific lenses have been used that focus on the surf conditions.

"As long as it remains in the condition it's in, there is no privacy issue," he said.

However, the city won't be providing a link to the webcam to its website for a number of reasons, Santos said.

"That is what the chamber of commerce is for," he said.

Treasure Island webcam gives surfers, tourists a look at waves 10/30/14

[Last modified: Thursday, October 30, 2014 5:00pm]

