

Beach closures

On average, Corey Beach has been closed every eighth day this year

BY RANDALL WASZYNSKI

Corey Beach in Blue Point has faced four separate multiple-day closures since May 29, tallying up to 10 missed days at the beach, according to data provided by Suffolk County Department of Health Services. This beach has endured the most days closed out of any beach within the Town of Brookhaven.

Large volumes of harmful bacteria — enterococci, primarily — in the water caused 80 percent of the days closed at Corey Beach. Enterococcus bacteria originates in the guts of animals, including humans, and makes up one third of the weight of animals' feces.

Brookhaven Town has taken on 58 closures so far this year, 17 of which involved harmful bacteria present in the water.

The presence of harmful bacteria in the water, such as enterococci, caused 45 percent of all closures in Suffolk County this year thus far; the remaining portion of those closures involved precautionary rainfall-related advisory, issued by the county.

County comptroller John Kennedy held a press conference Aug. 1 at Corey Beach alongside Brookhaven Town officials alleging that county executive Steve Bellone has been financially irresponsible, specifically in regard to the Drinking Water Protection Program. Kennedy, who is currently campaigning to be elected county executive against Bellone, claims that the Bellone administration has dipped into the fund for miscellaneous expenses as well as salary compensation.

"He has been diverting that quarter-cent funding that is dedicated specifically to protecting the ground-

water, the aquifer and to do capital projects," Kennedy said at the press conference.

"The use of environmental funds to balance the budget was a longstanding practice, and county executive Bellone ended it when he took office," said Peter Scully, DEC regional chief.

Reallocations from a fund of this kind call for a vote by the county Legislature, and Scully says that Kennedy, as comptroller, voted repeatedly to dip into the fund.

"[Kennedy] oversees the use of various county funds to pay the county's operating expenses," Scully said. "His office dipped into that fund regularly to pay for expenses that have nothing to do with the environment. It's kind of a head-scratching effort to rewrite history and blame the county executive for a practice that he is actively supporting."

Kennedy also claims that a lack of sanitarian workers, given a shortage in funds, has contributed to the amount of closures across Suffolk. This is a claim, however, that DHS' data contradicts, since it cites a reason for each closure as either large volumes of harmful bacteria present in the water or precautionary rainfall-related advisory.

Former assemblyman Dean Murray, Kennedy's chief of staff, said that there are not enough sanitarians going out to test the water on a regular basis for the entirety of Suffolk, and took concern to the term "precautionary" with rainfall-related advisory.

"Does that mean that there was not a sanitarian that went out there and actually tested?" Murray said. "If they're closing on a precaution because of heavy rainfall, that is telling me you did not send someone out to test; you are just closing it just in case, which tells me you do not have enough sanitarians." ■



Councilman Neil Foley, comptroller John Kennedy and supervisor Ed Romaine visited Corey Beach earlier this month to discuss the large volumes of harmful bacteria — enterococci, primarily — in the water that caused 80 percent of the days closed.

File photo