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Chamber leader downplays significance of beach closing

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SURF CITY — The head of the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce said Tuesday he does not see the beach closing affecting business. Rick Reynolds, the chamber's executive director, said that at this early stage in the year, the tourism season is far from starting.

"I don't see it having a change or impact on business. I would assume as they clear various parts they will reopen them. I think this is insignificant economically," said Rick Reynolds.

Reynolds also said the inconvenience to visitors should be minimal since there are many more miles of beach that make up Long Beach Island. "As we move forward the significance of this will become smaller and smaller. People have a myriad of options on the island," Reynolds said.

The discovery of military munitions on the beach last month contributed to the delay of the beach-replenishment project's completion, a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has said. The corps began a geophysical investigation and electromagnetic survey of the beaches on Monday.

Reynolds said he can understand the businesses concerns are real and momentary but he doesn't think it is a sensational story.

"I don't know what to do at this point in time but keep the pressure on and keep concerns high."

Reynolds said it is on his calendar to go down to the beach and speak with the engineers conducting the survey. He added that the beach replenishment project was necessary for Surf City.

"The truth of the matter is this is a much-needed project to maintain the nourishment of the beaches. We needed this project to nourish that natural resource for the benefit of all. In a way it's a cost of doing business," he said.

Thirteen percent of the economy in Ocean County comes from tourism, according to Reynolds.

Reynolds said it's too soon to make a decision on how it's going to affect the economy until the progress is seen.

"This has just begun. We're at the 3rd of April so by the 30th we'll probably have a pretty good picture of what Memorial Day will look like," Reynolds said.

"As time goes on the concern should wane somewhat."

Reynolds said his personal perspective is in light of the medical waste wash-up that struck Long Beach Island in the late 1980s. Reynolds had just become president of the chamber. Reynolds said he was also a business owner and there were a lot of TV cameras in his face.

"In light of that event, how significant is this event? If it seems like I'm not getting all twisted about this, it is because this is a short-term fixable event. If I seem unconcerned it's because I

have it in perspective," Reynolds said.

Reynolds said something positive that came out of the medical waste wash-up: more stringent water-quality testing. Reynolds chuckled as he said he remembered saying on television that the wash-up would be the best thing that had ever happened to the island.

"There will be good that comes out of this issue too. This event is different. This will be over in two months," he said.

Khaalid Walls, a spokesman for the corps, said Tuesday that the corps is aiming for reopening the beaches by May 25 but Memorial Day is the goal.

"The scanning project started Monday, taking the magnetometers towed array up and down the beach. No other munitions have been found yet," Walls said.

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