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## Goodbye

**by Ryan Bray** ORLEANS – The man was stuck in what Greg Johnson called “the O Zone.” He can’t recall the year, but memories of the rescue stick with him to this day.

The weather was bad, and Nauset Beach was closed to swimming due to the intensity of the surf, recalled Johnson, one of three lifeguards who braved the treacherous conditions to rescue the man from drowning.

“We had to throw the flippers on and go in this water, into this six or eight foot surf,” said Johnson, 64. “You had to go under each wave. Come up, go down, come up...and meanwhile you’re looking for this guy’s head.”

Johnson eventually spotted the victim, swimming parallel to the waves to reach him. He threw the man a floatation device while he, his fellow lifeguards and the victim awaited a line to pull them back onto shore.

“That was life or death, and I’ll never forget that,” he said. These are the things that stand out to Johnson as he reflects



on his decades-long tenure lifeguarding at Nauset. On Labor Day, he donned his whistle for the final time, retiring from the lifeguard job he’s held at the beach for 44 years.

An athlete, Johnson’s resume includes 19 United States Lifesaving Association national appearances and one national championship appearance, the result of years spent competing as a runner and paddle boarder against lifeguards from all over the country.

But these days, he said he can’t compete the way he once used to.

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