

## Wave of goodwill

3 August 2007 -- By Peter Gardiner

There is a wave washing around Australian coastal regions that has swept up Ian and Sharon Felsing of Sunrise Beach.

The tsunami of goodwill is enabling people who have battled with disabilities to break free through one of the purest feelings of all – surfing the pulse of the ocean.

Ian, the father of local pro-junior surfing talent Shane, grew up riding the large southern swells of Victoria.

Ian and Sharon Felsing of Sunrise Beach intend to play a big part in a new Sunshine Coast surf school for the disabled.

Having taught his three children to surf, he recently felt a tugging in his heart – a tidal restlessness to give something back to the sport. By chance he read a local article about Butterfly Kids, an organisation that helps children with disabilities to be a part of their communities.



Hoping to help in some way, Ian wasted no time in contacting its organisers to see what he could do. They had just been speaking with the Disabled Surfers Association on the Gold Coast – part of a movement that for 21 years has helped people with disabilities.

As fate would have it, the DSA is in the throes of starting up a Sunshine Coast branch, and the Felsingers have just had to climb on board.

Ian and Sharon have started attending special Gold Coast surfing events where the disabled get caught up in the surfing vibe.

From the moment he first took to the surf to help these special students, Ian knew this was the cause he had been looking for.

“It’s just not what you get out of it, but you can see from the looks on their faces what they get out of it,” he said.

Ian said while he has enjoyed helping the first-timers, he had also treasured seeing the look of rediscovery on the faces of former surfers who had been cut off from their passion because of severe injuries.

DSA national secretary Jim Bradley has no doubt there will be many more people like Ian and Sharon lining up to get the local branch rolling when they hold a public interest meeting on August 8 at the Maroochydore RSL at 7pm.

Disabled motorbiker Gary Blaschke started the DSA in 1986 and since then helps keep turning up when needed – if only the surf was that reliable.

Jim said that for every 40-50 disabled surfers who turn up to learn, at least 150 or so volunteers are required to help get them moving along.

Six assistant surfers – three with the board and three in the water along the way – is the best number.

They may have to deal with anything from quadriplegia to mild intellectual disabilities.

Jim has no doubt that once the DSA has put in its \$5000–\$7000 seed funding, the Sunshine Coast branch can be one of the most effective outfits, with likely bases in Noosa, the mid-Coast and Kings Beach.

He said the only payback for volunteers was to see lots of “smiles on dial” as the disabled surfers felt the rush of water over their bodies and tasted the salt on their lips.

Anyone wishing to help can contact Jim on 0410 612 205 or go to the DSA website at [www.disabledsurfers.org](http://www.disabledsurfers.org).