



B.J. Gorman, 3, sees eye to eye with finny friend.

Jennifer Koss

Long lab open house attracts the curious

Scores of the curious, from youngsters to oldsters, visited UC-Santa Cruz' Long Marine Lab yesterday to probe the mysteries of the sea.

The occasion was the lab's seventh annual open house. University students and volunteer docents led tours, manned exhibits and gave slide shows to explain what goes on at the lab in Younger Lagoon.

People peered into microscopes and fish tanks, touched algae, anemones and starfish and watched demonstrations of sea lion training.

Applause and laughter greeted the capers of sea lions Rocky and Gertie, who performed tirelessly for rewards of fish. Responding to their trainers' hand signals during solo performances, they swam under and over black balls, white balls, cubes and other floating objects, now and then dampening their audience with an enthusiastic splash.

Another popular item was the Children's Corner, where youngsters busily colored and painted and fashioned origami paper fish hats.

The Children's Corner has been a regular feature of the lab's open house since the second year, marine program director Bill Doyle said. It was added after the first open house in 1978, he said, when parents mentioned they had trouble studying exhibits with impatient children in tow.

"Having the Children's Corner has really been marvelous," Doyle said. "They remember that, so little kids like to come back."

After studying the exhibits, some visitors tested their new knowledge by taking a computer marine science quiz. Those who took the quiz received a certificate and a computer printout of their score.

Also featured were regularly scheduled slide shows on such topics as killer whales, seals and sea lions, seabirds and coastal erosion hazards along the Monterey Bay shoreline. There was a butterfly exhibit, a marine stamp collection. The skeleton of an 80-foot blue whale that washed ashore several years ago in Pescadero was also on display. The skeleton is currently undergoing reconstruction.

The sea chanties and peppy tunes of the Dog Watch Nautical Band mingled with the smells and sights of sea life. People munched on hot dogs and free cookies, strolling to and from exhibits or pausing for a while to listen to the music.

Overcast skies didn't seem to affect the number of visitors, director Doyle said. He didn't yet know the final tally, but he said he expected it to top last year's figure of over 3,000.

Though a light drizzle began falling about 3:30 p.m., shuttlebus loads of visitors were still arriving.

"We're really pleased that people are interested in what we're doing," Doyle said.

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