



Seymour makes a splash

Marine Lab's
Discovery Center
celebrates its
grand opening



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Katie Clements takes a close look at a shellfish at the petting tank during the Seymour Center's grand opening Saturday, which continues today from noon to 5 p.m. Top, Miranda Baker lines up a telescope for a look out to sea.

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Hands-on exhibits get a thumbs-up

Long Marine Lab
By DAN WHITE
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ

ECO-TOURISM IN SANTA CRUZ got a boost Saturday when the Seymour Marine Center opened its doors to 4,000 visitors, giving them a taste of a working marine laboratory. The ambitious exhibits introduced visitors young and old to scientific sleuthing work on everything from disappearing Alaskan sea otters to an elephant seal's swimming stamina. The exhibits are presented in a straightforward manner so even scientific novices can understand.

A human greeter in a starfish costume was part of the user-friendly atmosphere, explaining to youngsters that she had three organs in one — “the mouth, the digester and the extricator.” The staff brushed aside comparisons to

the giant Monterey Bay Aquarium 50 minutes south of here. Instead, they depicted the new center as a complementary attraction, giving visitors an introduction to research programs at the UC Santa Cruz's Institute of Marine Sciences.

“The aquarium does incredible programs and is a huge facility compared to this, but their focus is a bit different,” center director Julie Barrett Heffington said. “We're trying to provide an authentic experience inside a lab.”

She estimated there will be 80,000 to 100,000 visitors each year. While the bulk of the actual lab work will continue in areas off-limits to the public, center staff will give visitors regular updates, Heffington said.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, which funded the Monterey attraction, also contributed to the Seymour center through their non-profit foundation.

Aside from providing a new must-see attraction to city visitors, the \$6.25 million Seymour Center is intended to boost interest in careers involving the sciences, from the classroom to the research lab.

The exhibits were spartan compared to some aquariums, but they had a directness and immediacy that grabbed visitors.

Eli Dykaar, 3, sat motionless with his eyes pressed close to a salt-water tank as he watched an enormous sheep crab.

The creature looked like it had crawled out of a 1950s monster movie. Dykaar couldn't keep his eyes off it.

“We've been sitting here for a while now,” said his mother, Ginger Fry.

Visitors also read up on some pending research, including work by Phil Crews, who is studying how marine sponges use chemicals in self-defense and whether those substances could be used to help defend hu-