



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The new marine center has three massive bays for research and lab studies.

Marine lab

Continued from Page A1

ties in Santa Cruz.

Marine Discovery Center fundraisers recently met their \$6.25 million goal after receiving a \$250,000 grant from the Joseph M. Long Foundation, said Julie Barrett Heffington, the center's director. The grant will go toward designing and building exhibits.

"The aim is to tell the story of the ocean's environments from the perspective of the ocean scientists," Davenport said.

More than 30,000 people a year now visit the lab, and Davenport estimates three times as many could visit after the Marine Discovery Center opens.

Construction of the 20,000-square-

foot center has been completed except for some minor work.

The opening was previously set for this fall, but cash-flow problems have moved it back, Heffington said.

The facility will likely open in January for K-12 school groups, and it could open to the general public by early March, Heffington said.

"But it's not written into stone," she added.

The center will feature, among other things, interactive displays and aquariums.

Three high-ceilinged bays will house the exhibits, aquariums and touch-tanks. The interior has an industrial appearance, which Heffington said was done to create an atmosphere like that of a working research center.

Indeed, unlike a traditional aquarium, the Window of Discovery program aims to show visitors what scientists actually do to study the ocean and its inhabitants, Heffington said.

For example, visitors at the new center may look at the instruments scientists attach to elephant seals to study the animals, Davenport said.

Two of the bays connect to classrooms for young students. The center also features a large teaching laboratory for university students, an auditorium and gift and book store.

This week, the Public Education Program is preparing to move into offices at the center, which smells of fresh paint and new carpet.

Sentinel staff writer Robin Musitelli contributed to this report.