

Seymour Center Volunteer Program Celebrates 40th Anniversary; Receives Recognition at 2019 Be the Difference Awards



SANTA CRUZ, CA—This year, 2019, marks the 40th anniversary of a team of volunteers who have changed our community and the world for the better. Though this is a significant milestone, their work could not be more important or relevant than it is right now.

While the Seymour Marine Discovery Center will turn 20 next year, this Center is the legacy of an earlier time—a time when on the outskirts of Santa Cruz, a group of volunteers based from a trailer, worked in an “education center” that was housed in a former tool shed. These volunteers were referred to as the Long Marine Lab Docents. Although that program has evolved with a permanent home base opening in 2000 (the Seymour Center), the heart of it remains the same: volunteer educators helping people from all walks of life to learn about coast and ocean, science and conservation. Today this volunteer program is comprised of not only docents, but also exhibit guides, school program instructors, aquarists, gardeners, and individual volunteers who help in every area of a robust science education center. While many of our volunteers were not born when this program began 40 years ago, there are others who have been with us since the “trailer” days.

Through time, this team of volunteers has done amazing work. They have provided enriching marine science experiences for well over a million and a half people. They’ve run science camps, taught grade-school students, led tours for visitors from across the globe, and taken care of fish and invertebrates—and in doing so, they’ve changed the lives of the people they’ve come in contact with. They are truly making a difference.

They bring their talents, expertise, and enthusiasm to their varied volunteer jobs. Volunteer school programs instructors inspire thousands of K-12 and community college students (more than 9,000 last year) to protect our oceans. Youth program volunteers help teach more than 120 children through summer camps every year (many on full scholarships), encouraging them to discover their “inner scientist.” Docents and exhibit guides instill the importance and fragility of coast and ocean through group tours and one-on-one interactions in the exhibit hall. Behind the scenes, aquarists care for the fish, crabs, and sea stars that delight our visitors every day, while gardeners nurture the unique native plant landscape surrounding the Center. Volunteers are fundamental to outreach events, administrative tasks, maintaining our exhibits, and so much more.

This mighty team currently consists of more than 200 volunteers, ranging in age from 15 to 93. They are as diverse in every other way as they are in age. Last year alone, they

donated a total of 20,329 hours teaching, inspiring, and sharing ocean science and conservation with nearly 70,000 people.

We recently acknowledged 11 volunteers who had reached milestones of 5, 10, 15, or 20 years of service. Additionally, 13 volunteers were recognized for their 200, 300, or 400 service-hour contributions, far exceeding their annual commitment. While this represents only the past year, this serves as an example of the long-term consistency and camaraderie within our volunteer team over time.

The actions of all of these volunteers show how important it is to care for the coast and ocean, and ultimately, for the planet. While each day's news cycle portrays the significant global challenges that face us all—a rapidly warming Earth, ocean pollution, the loss of species diversity, extended droughts, the fraying of our communities—our volunteers are actively working to solve these issues. They bring concrete solutions and thoughtful ideas to people who look to them for wisdom and guidance. They serve as inspirational role models for the public, for students, and for younger volunteers within their own ranks. They share evidence-based science and positive conservation solutions with not only our own community, but also with the multitudes of visitors who travel to Santa Cruz each year.

We can never thank them enough for sharing their talents, expertise, and enthusiasm with the local community and far beyond—this is why the Seymour Center nominated their work for the 2019 Be the Difference Award and why we are so grateful that the volunteer program was recognized with an award. It was our deepest wish that this group be honored through the Be The Difference Award to shine a light on how important their work has been over the years, and how important it will continue to be in the future. It is such a joy to bestow this honor on the more than 2,500 people who have volunteered in this program and who have made such an impact over the past 40 years (and who we have been so lucky to work with).

It was a bold vision to start a science education program 40 years ago with no real facility, no budget, and no staff. But volunteers stepped into that void, took on that challenge, and ultimately, have made a real change in the world.

In Santa Cruz, there are so many valued and worthy organizations doing such important work. It can often be hard to measure the impact of a program like this as its accomplishments are attached to the long arc of time. But volunteers in our program work with teachers, kids, and the community in a thousand small ways to affect the future of the planet itself. Our volunteers are busy making a difference every day, building the next generation of leaders and involved community members to ensure that the legacy of California's science-based environmental leadership continues in the world.