



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Shelley Dawicki
508-495-2378
shelley.dawicki@noaa.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 25, 2008

Local High School Student Experiences Marine Science Firsthand at Woods Hole Science Aquarium in Massachusetts

They came from diverse educational and family backgrounds and from states across the nation. For Erin Rockwell of Rochester, N.Y., one of the 11 high school and college students who spent the summer working or volunteering at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium (WHSA) on Cape Cod, Mass., it was a summer to remember.

Rockwell, who is homeschooled, admits she was “a bit nervous” about traveling to Woods Hole and participating in a marine science career program. It was her first time away from home, but said she felt comfortable as soon as she met WHSA Curator George Liles and the other students.

“I considered marine biology as a possible career before I came to Woods Hole, but now I am convinced this is what I want to do,” she said of the experience. “Getting actual experience at something you think you might want to do is important. And it was fun.”

Feeding fish, training two harbor seals, cleaning tanks, leading shore-side collecting trips for the public, and helping children and adults learn about marine animals at the touch tanks were all part of her daily routine.

The WHSA, the nation's oldest public research display aquarium, offers two summer programs for high school students who have completed grade 10 or higher, a five-week internship and a two-week career seminar in late July. Both programs are run by the WHSA staff, and are projects of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, which operates the Aquarium and is part of NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service, and the neighboring private non-profit Marine Biological Laboratory.

Rockwell participated in the two-week Careers in Marine Science Seminar July 21 to August 1, along with four other high school students from California, Utah and Massachusetts. Several seminar students, including Rockwell, stayed on as interns for an additional 1-2 weeks to help with animal husbandry and to serve as junior naturalists on collecting walks, working with college student interns.

As a career seminar student she received training in marine animal husbandry and basic aquarist chores, heard presentations from scientists working in a variety of marine fields, went on collecting trips, visited other Woods Hole science institutions, and went on field trips to New Bedford and Nantucket.

The seminar is designed to give students an idea of what people working in Woods Hole do and how different areas of science contribute to the larger effort to understand the marine world and to manage marine resources wisely.

The annual program also provides students with the opportunity to work with a professional staff caring for a collection of about 140 species of fish and invertebrates common to the continental shelf from Maine to North Carolina, two harbor seals named LuSeal and Bumper, and sometimes sea turtles held for rehabilitation and eventual release.

Although she is a high school junior, Rockwell attends Monroe Community College in Rochester, where she took a biology class last year. She will take three classes at the college in the fall, including the next level biology course.

During past summers, she has taken a class at the Buffalo Zoo focused on veterinary care for zoo animals, volunteered for several summers at the Genesee Country Museum, and participated in a summer camp there. She had visited Cape Cod and the WHSA before with her family and knew she would love to work with marine animals and work in an aquarium, never thinking she would have that opportunity.

Rockwell especially enjoyed the “behind-the-scenes” aquarium experience, being outside on collecting trips and visits to other organizations. She says she has learned about many aspects of marine animals, marine science research and conservation, and possible careers.

“I even liked cleaning the tanks and helping around the aquarium with everything there is to do.”

The group was kept busy during the day, and enjoyed many activities together at night and on weekends, from playing soccer and seeing the latest Batman film at the local theater to a bonfire on the beach. They even spent a “Night at the Aquarium,” eating pizza, playing games and sleeping on the conference room floor.

Rockwell says her WHSA summer experience was successful and met all her expectations. “I learned a lot, got to work with marine animals, met a lot of cool people, and went home happy.”

###