Directors Corner By Bruce Koike

On my way to the Aquatic Animal Life Support Operators (AALSO) symposium in Seattle recently, I decided to stop at a small diner in Otis, Oregon. My mission was to obtain one of their scrumptious, home-made cinnamon rolls for the drive. Mission accomplished as the roll was purchased without any waiting...perfecto. It had been a bunch of years since I had one of their cinnamon rolls and I was anticipating "WOW" moments. My thought after the first bite was, "Well, it's a cinnamon roll", not “Fantastic", not "Wow!"

So what happened in this minor disappointment? I considered several possibilities including: “Maybe I wasn’t a pastry fan anymore (no, I'm still a sucker for pastries)”, or “Maybe I was full (but I didn’t have breakfast), or “Maybe it was too early for a sweet treat (never). In the end, the pastry just didn’t measure up to what I was expecting.

We all have expectations that extend into many facets of our life. The outcome of an event may or may not be what we were expecting. Regardless, we need to handle those outcomes.

In a similar manner, the Aquarium Science Program has expectations for those who choose to study with us. Most individuals who complete their study option tend to meet or exceed expectations with regards to learning, grades...

Testing the Waters By Harrison Baker

After much effort, I have decided what I want to be when I grow up. I only had to stop trying so hard to grow up.

In high school, I took an interest in octopuses. I never considered myself the “science type," and I soon decided that I wanted to be a reporter. I placed my aquatic interests on the backburner as I pursued what I thought was a more practical dream.

That dream, fitful though it was, somehow carried me through five years of college. After the first three, I realized that a full-time reporter's life was ultimately not a good fit. By the time I graduated last year, I had gained a reputation as an okay writer, and as the guy who wouldn't shut up about cephalopods.

I was adrift, and I needed a new field. I had heard about the Aquarium Science program from a former co-worker, and I thought it looked interesting. It appealed to me professionally. It appealed to me academically. Most importantly, it appealed to me personally. I decided to apply, and to pursue the dream that I had ignored far too long.

I will always be a writer, but I want to be something more. I want to do something for a living that makes me smile while I’m doing it, not just when I’m done. A life spent on the phone and in front of a keyboard is not, for me, a complete life.

With a move to Newport and my first classes approaching, I still don't know what to expect in the long run. I’m okay with that. I know I’ve found a field broad enough to give me options and deep enough to give me purpose.

So I find myself in a familiar situation: assembling a publication. Even this feels strange and new again—and it probably shows.

I may not know exactly where I am going, but at least I know how to get there.

Proper handling technique is part of the lessons learned as demonstrated by Melissa Bishop (Apple Valley, MN).
Interview with Christina J. Slager  
Aquarium of the Bay  
San Francisco, CA

Q: What is your exact title, and how long have you worked in your current position?
A: Director of Husbandry, Aquarium of the Bay, San Francisco, CA; one year.

Q: What would you expect of an employee new to the field?
A: My hope would be that a new employee would have a good understanding of the basic principles of caring for aquatic animals in captivity: an understanding of water quality as it relates to fish and invertebrates; a familiarity with common medical issues; a familiarity with plumbing and filtration; some experience with animal capture and collection; the interpersonal skills to work in a team environment.

Q: What is your professional background?
A: I've worked in the professional aquarium field for about 25 years, most notably at Steinhart Aquarium in San Francisco, at Aquarium of the Americas in New Orleans, the Monterey Bay Aquarium in Monterey, and now at the Aquarium of the Bay in San Francisco. I've done field work in the Republic of Kiribati, in the Florida Keys, and in Peru. I've worked extensively with many species of penguins—including two trips to Antarctica—and other than marine birds, I've particularly enjoyed working with sharks and ocean sunfish.

Q: What did you expect when you started out in the field? How did your expectations line up with the reality of the work (in other words, how did your training prepare you?)
A: I had a somewhat romanticized idea of the profession and wasn't well prepared for the more technical aspects of the field.

Q: What size is your aquarium staff, and what are their backgrounds and responsibilities?
A: The Aquarium has about 100 employees, depending on the season. The Husbandry department has 10 employees. Their responsibilities include exhibit maintenance, animal care and feeding, water quality testing, animal collection, presenting public programs, participation in research.

Q: What sort of animals does your facility have? How large is it, etc. As Director of Husbandry, you might describe how you manage your workload.
A: The Aquarium of the Bay focuses on the fish and invertebrates of the San Francisco Bay and surrounding waters, and we also have a small exotics component. We display over 20,000 aquatic animals as well as terrestrial animals like banana slugs, California king snakes, tarantulas, western pond turtles, hedgehogs, blue-tongued skinks, chinchillas and honey bees. Our facility is 50,000 square feet and our largest exhibit is 350,000 gallons.

Q: In your opinion, what should Aquarium Science grads expect in today's job market? What can they do to prepare themselves for a future as an aquarist or curator?
A: With the current economic situation, I'm really not sure about the job market. My advice would be to get as much hands-on experience with aquatic animals as possible, even if that means volunteering.

Industry Q & A (Continued on page 3)
was that my main two competitors for the job were twins and it was very difficult to choose between them.

Q: What size is your staff, and what are their backgrounds and responsibilities?
A: I have a staff of 10. Four had previous public aquarium experience. Seven put in some time as a volunteer in the Husbandry department. One person recently graduated from the aquarist training at Saddleback college. Husbandry staff are set as two-person teams, covering the seven days of the week. They share the responsibility of multiple galleries covering acquisition of specimens, quarantine of specimens, medicinal treatments, tank maintenance, and we participate in the maintenance of all LSS. Staff are encouraged to be involved in the development of new displays and graphics. There are three senior staff that work in the galleries and oversee the overall functioning of the husbandry staff.

Q: What sort of animals does your facility have? How large is it, etc.?
A: The Birch Aquarium's main focus is the local kelp forest habitat. Our largest tank is a 70,000 gallon live kelp display featuring a 250-lb. Black sea bass, Stereolepis gigas. This tank is part of a 120,000 gallon semi-closed system and includes 18 other tanks. We feature specimens from the Sea of Cortez, and the tropical Indo-Pacific.

Q: In your opinion, what should Aquarium Science grads expect in today's job market? What can they do to prepare themselves for a future as an aquarist or curator?
A: First, and most importantly, this is not a high paying job. It is a job of love. You won't become rich, but you will go home very satisfied. Your work actually reaches people. With the current economy, the job market is currently very tight. To be noticed you need to have some experience. I can't stress the value of volunteering in a husbandry field. This really shows a potential employer that you are serious about the job. On the bright side there are still new aquariums being designed, throughout the world. Many aquariums are planning for expansions as the economy becomes better.

Interview with Lance Ripley
Audubon Aquarium of the Americas
New Orleans, LA

When Lance Ripley interviewed for a job with the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas 15 years ago, he thought he had bombed. Despite his doubts, he got the job—his first out of school. Today, Ripley, 37, is the curator of the aquarium’s aquatic center. The aquatic center, an off-site holding facility, plays host to a variety of species. As of mid-May, these included sea turtles, jellies, redfish and various elasmobranch species.

Ripley said he would expect new hires to possess general husbandry and observational skills. He would also expect them to be able to articulate what they already know and compare and contrast their knowledge with their new duties.

“We’ve had folks that have been, on paper, intensely qualified,” he said, but who were unable to relate their qualifications to the workplace. He said, however, that the aquarium has not hired new staff recently.

A graduate of Bowling Green State University in Ohio, Ripley has held his current position for about a year—since the new aquatic center was built. The 15,000-square-foot facility consists of two 30,000-gallon systems and one 90,000-gallon system. A staff of 15 maintains the facility.

When Ripley first started out at the aquarium, he was surprised by the flexibility of his new workplace.

“I had expected that I would have a lot less freedom than I did,” he said. Some aquarists, for example, prefer to cut up fish to make them easier for the animals to eat, while others leave fish whole.

“As long as the animals were healthy and the exhibits looked good, it didn’t matter how you got there,” he said.

The exhibit area of the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas contains about one million gallons of salt and fresh water, and covers about 75,000 square feet. The aquarium is part of the Audubon Nature Institute, which also includes the Audubon Zoo and Audubon Insectarium.

Interview with Nathan Carpenter
Ripley’s Aquarium of the Smokies
Gatlinburg, TN

Aquarium Science graduate Nathan Carpenter works as a marine biologist at Ripley’s Aquarium of the Smokies in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. He started at Ripley’s a year and a half ago. He currently oversees living coral, electric eels, archer fish and some holding tanks. He is

(Continued on page 4)
also in charge of large animal records.

Carpenter said Ripley’s is generally flexible when it comes to prior experience, and provides extensive on-site training for new hires—about four months of it. However, the aquarium does expect knowledge of fish anatomy, biological and mechanical filtration and chemistry.

“You train with every single staff member,” he said.

The staff at Ripley’s consists of 16 aquarists, two senior aquarists and the director of husbandry. The staff works in two shifts of eight aquarists, with a senior aquarist overseeing each.

Carpenter said the current job market is very competitive, and some aquariums have downsized recently. Still, positions are available in the industry.

“I think kids that come out of the Aquarium Science program in particular have a good chance,” he said.

Carpenter performed his Aquarium Science internship at the Downtown Aquarium in Denver, Colorado. He also has a degree in university studies.

Carpenter spent a week in May fishing for sharks off Myrtle Beach. Overall, the process took a month, and brought in two female sand tigers.

“It was an amazing experience,” he said. “I absolutely loved it.”

A couple of thanks are due.

Thanks to Harrison Baker for putting together this newsletter. Harrison will be joining us later this summer as an Aquarium Science participant.

Thanks also to SYSCO Food Services of Portland for the donation of laptop computers, one of which was used by Harrison.

Visit our website www.occc.cc.or.us/aquarium

A group of Aquarium Science students attended the Aquatic Animal Life Support Operators (AALSO) symposium in Seattle on April 19-22. The College Foundation Board paid 50% of the registration fee and Seattle Aquarium provided sleeping accommodations. The group was nourished both physically and mentally throughout the symposium.

We want to be responsive to the expectations of both our students and the industry. In the end this is the best way to develop personnel for the aquatic animal husbandry profession and to have these graduates “Meet or exceed” the expectations of their employers. Read on to find out what some of your colleagues’ expectations are of Aquarium Science graduates.