The screeching calls of two adult bald eagles outside the office window draws my attention to the question, “How do we take this program to a higher level?” One thing that will help fulfill this aspiration is the effective use of the 9,200 sq. ft. Aquarium Science building. This structure will be in full use this coming fall and with the dependable help from 3-4 Aquarium Science students, this activity has proceeded smoothly and with significant strides. Our bio-media is being seeded (plumbing job done by students and thanks to Fritz Industries for providing their live bacteria concentrate) while we put supplies and instrumentation in their proper place. Our target is the August 20 ribbon-cutting ceremony!

Besides this project, numerous other activities swirled about during the school year. In late January, we hosted the National Visiting Committee that is tasked with the program’s annual external evaluation. This activity seeks to identify both strengths and short-comings of the program. This year Landry’s Downtown Aquarium (Rob Brynda), Walt Disney World (Scott Martin), Monterey Bay Aquarium (Paul Clarkson), Seattle Aquarium (Tim Carpenter), and Stephen Birch Aquarium (Leslee Matsushige) each supported their staff member’s participation in the review. Faux interviews, classroom observations, sessions with students, get to know you sessions, meeting with key stakeholders, and a tour of the construction site were hallmark events of the 4 day work trip.

The spring break delivered good weather above the 45th parallel as students and I ventured to the Seattle Aquarium, Vancouver Aquarium and Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium. You’ll read about the student’s impressions of the trip, their response was overwhelmingly positive and they talked about how cool it was to have the privilege of spending the night at the Seattle and Vancouver Aquariums. They also spoke at length about how fun and interesting it was to get behind-the-scenes tours of each facility led by curators and senior aquarists.

Natalie was especially pleased. She said, “I thought that the trip was very well planned and organized. The aquarists who gave us tours were all extremely nice and eager to show us around. It was the most fun I have had in a long time.”

“Very well planned. A good variety of exhibits and systems.” Offered Jordan.

(See “Director’s Corner” on page 4)

AQS Students Enjoy Memorable 2011 Spring Break Trip

By Sid Stetson

This year’s Spring Break AQS trip headed north to the Seattle Aquarium, the Vancouver Aquarium and Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and a very good time was had by all. Bruce Koike led a group of nine AQS students on this year’s trip, an enthusiastic group that included first-year degree students Jordan Fry, Haley Rogers, Athena Jackson, Bianca Lunetta, Sid Stetson, and Natalie Watson, second-year degree student Amy Olsen, and certificate students Lori Boatwright and Brian Martineau. Jordan, Lori, and Natalie shared some thoughts on the trip for us and had some very interesting insights into the experience.

When asked about their overall impressions of the trip, their response was overwhelmingly positive and they talked about how cool it was to have the privilege of spending the night at the Seattle and Vancouver Aquariums. They also spoke at length about how fun and interesting it was to get behind-the-scenes tours of each facility led by curators and senior aquarists.

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“Very well planned. A good variety of exhibits and systems.” Offered Jordan.

(See “Spring Break” on page 2)
Lori took an aquarist’s view of the experience. “The facilities were very welcoming. It’s interesting how different the LSS is for each facility.”

When asked about their favorite parts of the trip, the responses favored Vancouver and the company of colleagues.

Natalie was especially fond of the Vancouver Aquarium. “It was pure magic.” She said, “The whole tropical room that you walked into and were surrounded by butterflies, parrots and sloths, was beyond compare. I also loved riding in the car with Brian, Haley, Jordan and Bianca. We really got to know each other, and I don’t think I’ve ever laughed that much in my life!”

Jordan mentioned the two overnight stays as the highlight of the trip. He said, “my favorite part would have been the overnight stay in both facilities. Being able to walk around Vancouver and Seattle unhindered by mobs of people made the trip well worth it, as I could spend quite a bit of time thoroughly viewing each facility.

Lori mentioned the behind-the-scenes tours as her favorite parts of the trip as well as the spirited conversations at meals. “Behind the scenes tours, playing Apples to Apples at Seattle Aquarium, spending time with everyone on the trip, laughing for 20 minutes during dinner over Thai food in Tacoma. Good times, good times.” She said.

Then we asked how their studies as AQES students changed how they viewed these and other facilities and there were some common threads in these responses as well.

“I think the trip opened my eyes to the amount of creativity and technology that can be used in public aquaria. I feel a deeper desire to try and work in one of these facilities given the chance.” Jordan said.

Natalie said, “My studies definitely changed how I viewed the aquaria that we visited. I understood how the filters, lighting and different components of the structure of an aquarium worked.”

Lori focused on her experience at Seattle. She said, “The first time I visited the Seattle Aquarium, I admit I was underwhelmed. They were in the process of construction on the WOWW exhibit, so that part of the aquarium was not open. To see the finished product was awesome. There was so much thought put into the design to make it easy for divers since there is a strong emphasis on diver interpretation in the exhibit. It was also interesting how they utilize every square inch of space in the building for LSS, holding or quarantine.”

When asked whether or not anything they saw changed their perceptions of an aquarist’s job responsibilities, the answers were quite insightful.

Lori mentioned that what she saw was consistent with her perceptions and experiences but mentioned that, “it was good for us to hear what different facilities expect from their aquarists. Some dove more, some required more LSS responsibility. It depended on the systems and animal collection.”
Jordan also cited the differences between different facilities. He said, “The tours behind the scenes helped bring into perspective the job duties and variation amongst aquarists.”

For Natalie, the trip and her experiences at one of the facilities may have informed her career decisions when she finishes the program. She said, “Seeing the aquarist’s job duties at a zoo and aquarium, such as Point Defiance, made me kind of lean more toward that. I have always loved aquatic animals, but equally loved terrestrial as well. I think that is something I would enjoy.”

Then we asked how and if their experiences on this trip changed how they perceived the AQS Program and the responses were especially interesting. Jordan mentioned that while his views of the program had not changed, the trip had been motivational and had made him, “more excited for system design and elasmobranches class. I suppose it helped trigger or spark that deeper desire to understand what the AQS program offers, but at a more in-depth level.”

Lori and Natalie were pleased and impressed with how the program and graduates are viewed by potential employers. When asked whether or not the trip had changed how she perceives the program, Natalie said, “Yes. But in a good way! I can’t believe that we got to tour at the places that we did. It really says something about the types of connections that are made through this program.”

Lori cited how students were treated by the senior staff members who conducted the tours. “It does show how well-respected this program is in the industry,” she said. “All of the curators were open for us to contact them if we had other questions.”

For our last question, we asked the students if they had any regrets. The ladies had none, but Lori did mention regretting not being able to go on next spring’s trip if one is offered.

Jordan, however, would have enjoyed an even more immersive experience at each facility. He regretted, “that they didn’t put us to work. I would have loved to have been able to get my hands wet changing filters, feeding, doing WQ tests. Learning more about the different processes and how they occur at each aquarium.”

Spoken like a true aquarist.
DIRECTOR’S CORNER (Continued from Page 1)

sessions in this edition. Sid Stetson, a degree seeking student graciously offered to interview and write this edition. We specifically thank Tim Carpenter (Seattle Aquarium), Dennis Thoney (Vancouver Aquarium), and Neil Allen (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium) for engaging us during our visit. A few special events entertained the group such as a late night invertebrate lab with Brett Vo (Vancouver), a shark feeding session with Dave Smith (PDZA,) and a walrus training session conducted by Amanda Schaeffer (PDZA). Thanks to those individuals for a grand trip.

This spring and summer we said farewell to a dozen individuals who invested the past one or two years of their lives to develop themselves as aquatic animal husbandry specialists. This speaks to a considerable level of commitment. When you have a vacancy at your facility, let me know and I’ll send the announcement to these recent graduates. This departure is met fairly quickly with the next in-coming class. This year’s cohort of new students are coming from Georgia, Texas, Illinois, Maine, Washington, Iowa, Colorado and Oregon.

HERE’S TO THE COMING YEAR!

Visit our website: www.oregoncoastcc.org

Aquarium Science Building Grand Opening!

Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

Final preparations are underway and Bruce with help from dedicated volunteers are working hard to get the new building ready.

The Grand Opening and Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony for the new AQS Building is scheduled for Saturday, August 20, at 2:00 PM!

All are welcome! Please set aside that afternoon to tour our new building!