

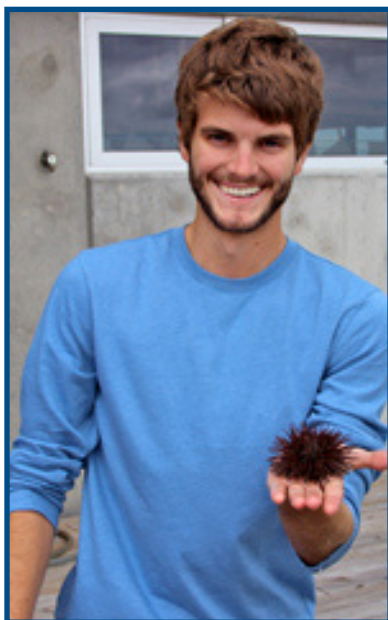
VIMS Eastern Shore Lab hosts first Marine Science Day

By Erin Kelly

(October 10, 2013) The Virginia Institute of Marine Science's Eastern Shore Laboratory (ESL) drew a large and enthusiastic crowd to its campus in Wachapreague for their first Marine Science Day open house on September 28th.

P.G. Ross, Acting ESL Director, estimates more than 300 people enjoyed a behind-the-scenes look at the Lab—which serves as both a field station in support of research and teaching, and as a site for resident research in coastal ecology and aquaculture.

Stephanie Bonniwell, manager of the ESL Seawater Laboratory, says she and her colleagues, “wanted to give the Eastern Shore community the opportunity to



VIMS Volunteer Tim Beck poses with a sea urchin from one of the touch-tanks available during Marine Science Day.



Making Science Fun: VIMS graduate student Annie Murphy shows one young visitor how she takes sediment cores for her research. Instead of using mud, Murphy decided to use a chocolate cake as her “sediment”, which proved to be very popular. Photo by Erin Kelly

see what students, scientists, and staff are working on in marine science, and to showcase the diversity of organisms that live in our tidal marsh and coastal lagoon ecosystems.”

Overall, the event gave visitors a chance to learn how VIMS scientists and students help to restore oysters, scallops, eelgrass, and various other marine species in Virginia's coastal bays. Kids and parents also got to experience marine life in a more hands-on way with several touch-tanks containing everything from sea urchins to hermit crabs.

“By opening our doors to offer a look inside at what our field lab is all about, our community gets a better understanding of the research and educational opportunities we provide for students and scientists,” says Bonniwell. “Many people wonder what happens here at the Eastern Shore Lab, so hosting an open house is a great chance for us to show and share with our neighbors.”

During the event, younger guests enjoyed marine-themed activities like a flounder-toss game, a fish-printing station, and a quick lesson on sediment cores using chocolate cake instead of mud. Kids also enjoyed coloring their own scallop and oyster crowns to wear while learning all about marine life and Chesapeake Bay.

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Ross says the overall goal of hosting an open house was to not only offer a behind-the-scenes peek at the campus for Eastern Shore residents, but to also offer them the opportunity to see the Lab's two new research facilities—Seaside Hall and the Seawater Laboratory.

The original Seaside Hall—which opened in 1995 and served as the Lab's main research building—was destroyed in a fire in 2010. Now rebuilt and enlarged to provide more space for research and public events, it stands across the street from the newly constructed, 7,597 square-foot Seawater Lab. The Lab provides easy access to clean, high-salinity seawater for researchers to rear, maintain, and study marine organisms under conditions that mimic those of the coastal and open ocean.

While this was their first open house, the VIMS Eastern Shore Lab supports a wide variety of educational activities ranging from single-day fieldtrips to multi-week classes for students from a variety of institutions. Instructors and students from William & Mary's School of Marine Science at VIMS, as well as numerous other colleges and universities in Virginia, other states, and even other countries, use the field station for classes.

For more than 20 years, VIMS Eastern Shore Lab researchers used grant funding to support 1-2 summer internships for local high school and college students each year. As part of a privately funded initiative, VIMS has expanded this summer internship program to hire five high school and college students from Accomack and Northampton Counties each year. ESL staff also host a variety of public education activities throughout the year.

With this being their first official open house, the ESL staff wasn't sure how many Eastern Shore residents would attend, but they ended up being very happy with the turnout.

"We were very pleased with the community's enthusiastic reception of our first Marine Science Day," says Bonniwell. "It's a rewarding experience to witness discovery and delight as our guests learn something new about a marine organism. Those 'aha' moments and smiles on their faces means a lot to us on the other side of the conversation."

As for next year, the ESL staff has not made any plans to make this an annual event just yet. "We anticipate that the incoming Director of the Eastern Shore Lab will determine the status of future Marine Science Day events," says Bonniwell. "Stay tuned!"

VIMS' Eastern Shore Laboratory (ESL) serves as both a field station and a site for resident research in coastal ecology and aquaculture. By virtue of its access to unique coastal habitats, excellent water quality, and an extensive seawater laboratory, the ESL affords educational and research opportunities not available elsewhere within the region. Over its 40-year history, the laboratory has become internationally recognized for shellfish research, with important contributions to molluscan ecology and culture.



Bay Scallop Restoration: Eastern Shore residents enjoyed learning about the research and efforts being done at VIMS Eastern Shore Lab to restore scallops in Chesapeake Bay. Photo by Erin Kelly