SignalViewpoints

SEASIDE AQUARIUM/SUBMITTED PHOTO

Seals and their winning ways make them top attractions at the aquarium.

For 80 years, Seaside Aquarium entertains crowds, aids marine life

The Seaside Aquarium celebrates its 80th anniversary this year. The May 30, 1937, Memorial Day weekend opening — "unmarred by any accident or difficulty" — was described by the Signal "far above the level of the corresponding weekend of the previous years." The aquarium's "unusual attractions" included "an electric ray fish capable of gathering enough electricity to provide a shock."

Keith Chandler, the fourth general manager of the aquarium, is a Seaside native who started his career at the aquarium in 1978 at the age of 21. The aquarium has been attracting visitors to Seaside since the time founder George Smith and others expanded their aquarium business from Depoe Bay to Seaside.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX

Smith bought the former swimming pool on the Prom, remodeled it and reopened it as an aquarium.

Entry was priced at an admission families could afford at 10 and 15 cents. It was a time before television and most Americans had little acquaintance with marine life. Local fishermen brought in deep sea creatures as exotic as the magical worlds of Jules Verne and adventure novelists. There was no Jacques Cousteau or his underwater cameras. The octopus, wolf eel and anemones were among the aquarium's first attractions.

But it is the seals people remember most, so popular "Feed the seals!" is the motto of the aquarium on a billboard on the south side of town.

"We don't train our seals, the public does," Chandler said. "The seals train the public to feed them."

Although baby seals don't live with their parents after being weaned, they stay with the same colony, up to 250 or 300 seals. "We have 11," Chandler said. "They all have different personalities. Some are more friendly, some are more aggressive, some are timid. It's just like having 11 cats."

The life span of a seal in the wild is about 15 years; in captivity about 20. He admits he likes some some seals more than others — "but I've liked them all."

One named Jenny, who lived to a venerable 27 years, came to mind as a special bond. Jenny was expert at taking and hiding things from Chandler.

Four generations of seals have been born and raised in the aquarium. And, of course, they all have names: today's cast includes Casey, Pinni, Damian, Frankie, Shireen, Vivian, Reagan, Lewis, Cosmo, Scully and Greta.

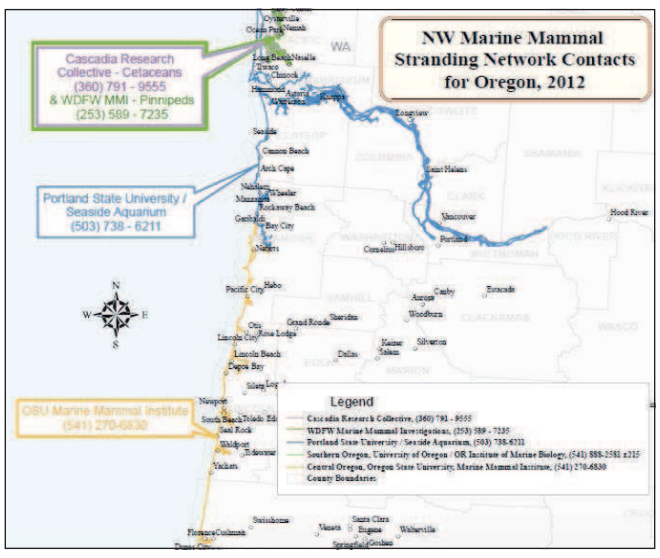
Brotula and greenlings

Along with the seals, the aquarium is home to a veritable encyclopedia of Pacific Coast marine life.

As recited by aquarium staff member Tiffany Boothe, the list includes, to name only a few, blue perch, vermilion rockfish, wolf eels, New England lobster, brown rockfish, copper rockfish, red-tail perch, white perch, urchins, keyhole limpets, sand sole, English sole, kelp greenling, ("She's a 'meanling,'" Boothe said) and brotula ("He's the coolest.").

As other worldly as these animals appear, Chandler is an expert at identification.

In his first years Chandler acknowledged he was baffled a few times, but with experience and the internet as a tool, he was able to determine even the most exotic marine life, like the fish brought to the aquarium by local fishermen in the wake of the Japanese tsunami.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Area covered by the aquarium as part of the Northwest Marine Mammal Stranding Network.

Chandler is the go-to guy for marine life identification, Boothe said.

"There was a time visitors reported this huge, long, flat fish," she said. "I had no idea what it was. I called Keith and said they're right, this is a very strange fish. Even now I don't know how to describe it."

She told Chandler the fish "is really long and has a big eye."

Chandler identified it as a "king of the salmon," a 6-foot ribbon fish, so named by Native Americans for the way they "led" salmon heading into rivers to spawn.

Stranding network

Aquarium staff play a critical role in the health and protection of vulnerable sea creatures.

The aquarium's range with the Marine Mammal Stranding Network stretches from Arch Cape to Long Beach, Washington.

These include high-profile whale rescues, rare turtles and seals.

When a whale washed ashore in Cape Falcon this year, aquarium staff were there.

When olive ridleys were stranded along the coast last year the team helped arrange transport for specialized medical care at Sea World in San Diego.

In February, when a loggerhead turtle was swept onto the beach near Chapman Point, aquarium staff member Tiffany Boothe hiked a mile and a half before wading into water and with the help of a volunteer, Mollie Schmidt, carried the turtle down the beach and over the dunes. When the tide came in, Boothe found herself swimming with the turtle through the icy-cold winter sea water,

"Swimming through the cave was not part of the original plan," Boothe laughed in the aftermath. "A lot of times you can walk around Chapman Point. That was what we were planning on doing. The tide was out we could get it up a steep path or a little sea cave seemed like a great idea. It was a little deeper than I thought."

The aquarium is located at 200 North Prom, Seaside. Admission is $8 for adults and $4 for children 6-13. Children under 5 are free. For more information visit seasideaquarium.com.

Q&A with Keith Chandler

Q: What type of people volunteer at the aquaurium?
CHANDLER: People who love animals.

Q: How do you select animals?
CHANDLER: They select us.

Q: How do you get your fish?
CHANDLER: Local fisherman. We have some pretty exotic fish right off our coast.

Q: What was your most difficult challenge?
CHANDLER: In 2007 we had to stay here 24 hours to keep the gas pumps going. It was quite an experience that i never want to do again.

Q: What would you do in the case of a tsunami?
CHANDLER: There's not much we can do if it's the big one. Our plan is, like everyone else, to head for the hills. We'd leave the garage door open so the seals could get out. Fish won't be as much as an issue. I'm more worried about the earthquake.

Administrative Assistant Tiffany Boothe and General Manager Keith Chandler

Surrey on down

Holy cow, will you look at that!" I said in amazement to Elaine, my friend back east. Elaine and I talk on the phone at least two times a week. There are weeks where we talk every day. We were really good friends in New York for 20 years; physical distance has not altered that. We say everything, which is why I blurted out my surprise seeing not one but two surreys making their way down my street.

"I didn't think they came this far south, " I said. "The rental places are all at least a mile north. But it is a nice day for a surrey ride."

Surreys were one of the many surprises I encountered when we first came to Seaside. As a kid growing up in Atlantic City, N.J., another major resort town, a lot of people who visited bikes, big trikes, and tandem bikes to ride on the famed boardwalk. You could also rent a rolling chair, which was an upholstered pram contraption set on caster wheels; locomotion was provided by a man (usually older and sorry looking) who pushed. As a child I felt a deep sorrow for the rolling chair operators who often pushed with both arms fully extended and their heads down. Their faces were often dripping with sweat and they looked like oxen being driven. The chairs themselves were heavy and the passengers often quite large; frankly the whole thing looked like a lot of work for little money; although I'm sure some riders tipped better than others. Who knows? But there was no such thing to rent like a surrey, a self-propelling novelty of Seaside.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX

When we first arrived on the North Coast, my husband was attempting to have a phone conversation with someone regarding something to do with his work. I didn't mean to, but I was eavesdropping. The other party must have used the word "surrey." I never knew the context. What I do recall is my husband mangling the pronunciation or not understanding the other party's word.

"Sorry?" he said. And then a moment later, "Suri? Siri?" The other party became exasperated.

"You haven't been here very long, have you?" she apparently scoffed.

Soon after they both got off the phone.

Whenever I hear the word 'surrey' my mind automatically goes to the 5th Dimension tune written by Laura Nyro, "Stones Soul Picnic," which in 1968 was No. 2 on Billboard's R&B chart and was, for awhile, the No. 3 pop song in the country.

"Can you surry, can you picnic /
Red yellow honey/
Sassafras and moonshine/
Can you surry."

I read an interview with the song's composer who said "Surry" wasn't "surrey," and that the word didn't mean anything. "It's just a nice word," is what she said.

When some folks hear the word "surrey" they think of the song from the musical "Oklahoma," "Surrey With a Fringe on Top." Something about that phrase always makes me think of maraschino cherries. I don't know why. I haven't noticed the surreys rented in Seaside having fringe. I have noticed people seem to love them. Whole families ride around, the adults doing the legwork while the little kids perch in front. It seems a fun way to get around if you want to check out broad swaths of the city and not walk. Of course you could always take the Trolley Street Car, which runs every Saturday and Sunday May 27 through Sept. 30.

There are three places to rent surreys in Seaside if you're so inclined. You don't have to be a tourist to rent one although tourists seem to enjoy them. Wheel Fun Rentals has two locations, one on Avenue A, the other on S. Holladay. The Prom Bike Shop rents surreys at their 12th Avenue shop.

LETTERS

No need to expand growth boundary

The preliminary population forecast for Clatsop County cities has just been released by Portland State University. The State of Oregon has designated that public agencies are to use this estimate for land planning purposes over the next 14 years. On a county basis, Clatsop County with a present population of 38,100 will only add 4,000 people over the next 50 years; a sizable reduction from numbers prepared earlier by the county.

This is a very small population growth with Astoria and the unincorporated areas having almost no growth and Warrenton having almost all the future growth. Seaside, Gearhart and Cannon Beach will each only add several hundred new residents over the next 50 years.

Hopefully, this should put an end to plans by the City of Seaside and the Seaside School District to expand the urban growth boundary of Seaside. There is no need for additional land outside the existing urban boundaries for hundreds of new homes and businesses in Seaside.

There is also no need to expand the Seaside urban boundary for the new schools. There is a perfectly good solution to protecting the students from tsunamis and providing new upgraded school facilities that doesn't require changing the urban boundary.

Why should, we the taxpayers, pay $40 million for student capacity growth when it's not coming?

The State Land Use planning laws have successfully limited urban sprawl by making sure that growth boundaries are not ignored. Don't let the City and the School District proceed with these misguided attempts to destroy the area's farms and forests.

John Dunzer
Seaside

Pollution results from converters

I have recently become interested in an uncertified-by-Oregon wood burning stove. Research has shown

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