



UNH Marine Docents Stay Up To Date With Changing Scientific Knowledge

Informational Meeting For Volunteers August 20, 2009

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DURHAM, N.H. - Marine educators near the Seacoast know that their teaching curricula, like their saltwater subjects, must adapt to changing times.

The University of New Hampshire Marine Docent program, now in its 32nd year, is a group of more than 170 volunteers who educate the community about coastal resources, teaching up-to-the-minute marine science at sea aboard the University's research vessel and volunteering at the Seacoast Science Center and the Great Bay Discovery Center. An information meeting for those interested in becoming a Marine Docent is on Thursday, Aug. 20, 2009 at 10 a.m. at the N.H. Sea Grant office at Kingman Farm on Route 155 in Madbury.

The Docents' challenge is being able to translate scientific information to the public to match the needs of the current times, explains Mark Wiley, N.H. Sea Grant marine educator. The Docents' SeaTrek educational programs, for instance, offered to schools and the public, are continuously reviewed and tweaked to reflect the most up-to-date information available.

"Our SeaTrek program about global climate change has traditionally been focused on the science aspects of the phenomenon," Wiley says. "The changing thoughts and increasing importance of this topic has caused us to shift the program's emphasis to what communities and individuals can do about it. Now we provide practical information on the next steps to take regarding climate change."

This proactive approach to marine literacy is not limited to one program — Wiley is working closely with Docents and other educators to develop new curricula about healthy seafood consumption and the current population status of New England fish species.

In addition, the Docents offer programs to encourage hands-on learning about lobsters, rocky shores, sandy beaches, aquaculture and marine mammals.

"The strength of the Docent Program is that we train people to help make marine science topics accessible to the public," Wiley says.

To prepare for their roles as educators, Marine Docents get hands-on training in local history and science by UNH faculty, extension educators and other experts in the marine field. Training takes place both inside the classroom and out, with a variety of field trips to sites around the Seacoast. The five-month training program begins in September, with courses held Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

No prior experience is required to become a Marine Docent. Ideal candidates possess a love of learning, a keen interest in the marine environment, a sense of stewardship for the marine world, and a desire to share their knowledge with children and adults in the community.

The Marine Docent Program is sponsored by N.H. Sea Grant and UNH Cooperative Extension. For more information or directions to Kingman Farm, please contact Mark Wiley or Dari Ward (phone: 603-749-1565; mark.wiley@unh.edu or dari.ward@unh.edu).

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.