

## Outreach That's Not Overdue

### Extension's Check Out UNH brought marine programming to public libraries

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DARI CHRISTENSON, MARINE EDUCATION PROGRAM MANAGER FOR NH SEA GRANT, BRINGS WHALE BALEEN TO THE EFFINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY. PHOTO BY JAKE KITTERMAN.

This summer, hermit crabs came to Hancock. Lobsters visited Lee. Blubber and baleen showed up in Berlin, and in Groveton, waves lapped the sandy shore.

No, sea-level rise isn't that extensive. Rather, a unique partnership between UNH Extension, NH Sea Grant's Marine Docents and the state's 235 public libraries shipped these briny

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resources to the farthest corners of New Hampshire. The initiative, called [Check Out UNH](#), sent 35 Marine Docents to 76 libraries across the state, where they shared insights into New Hampshire's small but mighty coastline and UNH's extensive marine research with more than 1,700 patrons.

Launched with donor funding, Check Out UNH's pilot year tapped into libraries' existing summer reading program, themed "Oceans of Possibilities" for 2022. The [Marine Docent program](#), which sends trained volunteers into communities and schools to share the wonder and science of the sea, was a natural collaborator to bring hands-on learning activities to the libraries.

The project exceeded expectations, with libraries clamoring to participate. "We've done summer library programs in the past, but this was another level," says Dari Christenson, marine education program manager for NH Sea Grant. "I didn't realize how popular it would be."

The popularity is hardly surprising, given the creativity of the activities. To help patrons understand how blubber keeps whales and seals warm in the chilly Gulf of Maine, Docents fashioned a "blubber glove" of plastic bags filled with Crisco. Participants dipped their gloved and naked hands into ice water to experience blubber's insulating properties. Other programs featured live



**IN STRATHAM, WIGGIN LIBRARY PATRONS EXPLORE SEA STARS AND OTHER INTERTIDAL CREATURES. PHOTO BY EMILY BUEHNE.**

creatures — lobsters, crabs, sea stars and more — and a docent-created wave tank that helped patrons visualize coastal erosion.

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“The kids were really engaged at all times. And there were a lot of parents that were just as interested,” says Emily Buehne '25, who served as Check Out UNH's 2022 summer coordinator through Extension's internship program. Adults, she said, peppered the docents with questions and shyly begged to pet the lobsters or sea stars

Buehne developed programmatic resources, interviewed librarians, sent a weekly email newsletter, measured results and helped make plans for the next several years. In addition to the Marine Docent summer reading support, Check Out UNH piloted an exploration kit with Stratham's Wiggin Library. Filled with shells and activities, the kit aims to “bring tidepool learning to places not near the Seacoast,” Buehne says. She also laid the groundwork for an interactive kiosk at the Dover Library that will soon connect library patrons with the latest research from UNH. And the Check Out UNH team is already making plans to connect UNH resources with the libraries' 2023 summer reading theme, “All Together Now: Kindness/Friendship/Unity.”

Check Out UNH garnered accolades from librarians across the state. “Programs such as this are instrumental in helping us achieve our mission of supporting students with out of school learning during the summer months,” said staff from the Newmarket Public Library. The Lebanon Public Library called it “one of our favorite programs this year,” adding, “UNH Marine Docents were such a delight!! We absolutely loved them.”

Equally important, the program amplifies Extension's goal of bringing UNH knowledge, education and resources to communities across the Granite State. "It gives us an opportunity to talk about UNH research," says Christenson, citing Sea Grant and Extension work on eradicating invasive green crabs as one example. "It sparks their interest to know that they can go see whales off our coasts, and there are scientists learning how to protect them."

Ken La Valley, vice provost for outreach and engagement, concurs. "Check Out UNH significantly extends the university's reach throughout the state, tapping into a beloved community resource — New Hampshire's public libraries — that values UNH as a leader in research, technical assistance and workforce development."



CHECK OUT UNH PILOTED AN EXPLORATION KIT TO BRING TIDEPOOL LEARNING TO NEW HAMPSHIRE PUBLIC LIBRARIES. PHOTO BY EMILY BUEHNE.

WRITTEN [Beth Potier](#) | Communications and Public Affairs |  
BY: [beth.potier@unh.edu](mailto:beth.potier@unh.edu) | 2-1566



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