



Education & Human Resources

Modest Extension efforts plant seeds which sprout nationally

TEACH A MAN TO FISH, the saying goes, and he will feed himself for life. Teach a kid to fish and chances are she'll grow up to be a good steward of the marine environment.

That's the theory behind the Master Angler Program, which trains adult volunteers to teach children the joys of fishing—a program that began in New York, developed in Oregon, and is now being emulated in every state in the union.

The theory—and the program—are just one example of what can happen when a program like Sea Grant tosses a small pebble into a very large pond.

The Master Angler Program came to Oregon in the late 1980s with Bruce DeYoung, who had been with New York Sea Grant when it launched a small model program to teach adults to teach kids something about fishing.

DeYoung (now Oregon's Extension Sea Grant marine trades and coastal recreation specialist) had just moved to Oregon and enrolled his daughter in summer camp at the 4-H Youth and Education Center in Salem. She came home disappointed that she and other kids had been repeatedly warned away from a tempting five-acre pond at the camp. With the New York angling program fresh in his mind, DeYoung asked why 4-H couldn't use Pagoda Pond to teach children about water safety and the aquatic



Photo by Bill D'Amico

This boy, enrolled in the 4-H club "The Castaways," is one of thousands of children who've benefited by collaborations launched by Sea Grant.

environment, instead of chasing them away.

He talked up the idea to Extension, 4-H, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) who all liked the idea, and so they hit the road to communities across Oregon in search of public support. They found plenty. "People were crazy about the idea," DeYoung recalls.

Before long, Extension Sea Grant, 4-H, and ODFW were collaborating on a pilot Master Angler Program. The idea was to "train the trainers," creating a pool of adult volunteers equipped to teach recreational fishing and

safety skills to children.

Extension Sea Grant (ESG) helped organize the effort, securing \$20,000 in donations to build and equip a state-of-the-art fishing camp at Pagoda Pond, including floating walkways, interpretive signs, and a cantilevered deck that lets children fish safely. ESG persuaded state agencies to stock the pond with warm-water fish, bought angling gear and water sampling equipment, and helped develop training materials for the adult volunteers. And then, as is its practice, Sea Grant stepped back and let 4-H and the ODFW proceed.

Today, Pagoda Pond and the Master Angler Program are a central part of summer camp at the Salem 4-H center. More than 4,000 children a year—at least 35,000 since the program began—have learned the joys of fishing under the tutelage of more than 350 certified adult Master Angler volunteers. ODFW, meanwhile, has carried the concept to additional youngsters through school districts, Boys and Girls Clubs, Police Activity Leagues, parks and recreation departments, retail sporting good stores, and other youth-oriented markets. And the effort has broadened its focus to include education about aquatic ecology and environmental stewardship, giving young anglers an understanding of how ecosystems contribute to the fun of fishing—and how fishing can contribute to the health or degradation of the environment.

But the benefits rippled far beyond Oregon's borders. Soon, Sea Grant programs in other states were picking up the concept, borrowing curricula and other material from Oregon, and adapting it to local needs. Just last year, DeYoung learned that the national 4-H program had committed itself to training two angler education experts in every state, and produced a curriculum that borrows heavily from the Oregon Sea Grant training materials.

"We took the smallest pebble and tossed it into the pond," says DeYoung, "and the ripples have

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— Bruce DeYoung

spread to potentially reach six million kids—the number enrolled in 4-H programs nationwide."

It's a model that Oregon Sea Grant has used often, and to good advantage, to nurture other worthwhile programs and projects.

Similar Programs

For example, a modest effort by an Extension Sea Grant educator to teach the public about marine mammals has grown over the years to be one of the most popular visitor attractions on the Oregon Coast. Each spring and Christmas break, thousands flock to coastal parks, headlands, and viewpoints to take part in the "Whale Watching Spoken Here" program in which trained volunteers show visitors how to spot gray whales migrating between their Bering Sea feeding beds and calving lagoons off the Baja coast.

While they're at it, the visitors learn something about marine mammal biology, behavior, and protection. Although the program is now run by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division, Sea Grant continues to be involved in training the volunteers and in

providing popular brochures on whale behavior and biology—brochures which are now available for downloading from the Oregon Sea Grant Web site.

Similar pilot projects have introduced Low Power Radio (LPR) technology to coastal parks, environmental viewing areas, and businesses. Sea Grant Extension and Communications staff have provided "loaned transmitters" capable of broadcasting to an area about the size of a large parking lot, helped develop educational scripts, and produced a variety of audio spots designed to inform visitors about the coastal environment, history, and economy. The program then employed graduate students to survey visitors about whether they tuned in to the broadcasts, how they received the messages, and what they would like to hear done better. As a result, Oregon Parks and Recreation and the Port of Newport now offer their own LPR programming to inform visitors about noteworthy parks and about the fishing economy of the Oregon Coast.