

Virginia Beach WOMAN



A bimonthly educational resource for the women of Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Chesapeake and Portsmouth



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VBW - A publication dedicated to education

Complimentary, please take one



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Women, Science, and the Sea



First mate and Laboratory Equipment Manager Jaime Belanger prepares a trawl net for sampling on the deck of the research vessel R/V Parker.

Written and photographed by
David Errickson

Wallops Island, Virginia – The vessel rolls comfortably in the afternoon swell two miles off the Assateague shoreline. On the gently shifting deck, first mate Jaime Belanger prepares a trawl net for deployment, closely watched by a dozen marine biology undergraduates from Millersville University of Pennsylvania. She concentrates on the procedure, methodically giving the cadence of assembly, the “how to” of wires, winches, shackles and otter doors. Safety tips are repeated again and again. “Don’t lean over the rail. Keep your hands away from the pulleys. Stand to this side when bringing the net aboard”. She is careful, practiced, and professional.

After the net drags behind the boat for several minutes, it is cranked aboard and spills its slimy bounty across the deck where it is eagerly sorted by Dr. Dominique Dagit and her students. They are aboard the R/V Phillip N. Parker, one of three research vessels owned by the Marine Science Consortium (MSC). Dr. Dagit’s class is one of many who will use these facilities. Offering a

wide variety of hands-on opportunities, MSC is a nonprofit educational corporation comprised of regional universities and colleges.

Described as “a residential, environmental learning center and field station”, programs are offered for pre-college, college aged, adult Elderhostel and family groups. Located on the Eastern Shore adjacent to the NASA Wallops Island testing center, MSC has served as an important marine and coastal education center since 1965. Every year, thousands of students and their teachers experience the ecology of a dynamic coastal system through The Marine Science Consortium’s school programs.

MSC is ideally located between the powerful Atlantic Ocean and ecologically important Chesapeake Bay. The barrier islands of the Eastern Shore create a series of close-by habitats that are biologically diverse and geologically dynamic. These natural classrooms introduce students to a variety of concepts in the biological, chemical, and physical sciences.

One of several women who work and teach at MSC, Belanger occupies her time when not aboard the R/V Parker serving as the college coordinator and equipment manager. She came to the facility as a seasonal instructor and fell in love with the sea and shore. This is a common story. Janelle Walters, Senior Instructor, came to MSC after attending classes there sponsored by Lock Haven University, one of the member colleges. Parker McMullen-Bushman, Special Programs Coordinator, hails from the Bronx and came to the Eastern Shore via Georgia, Maine, and the University of Illinois. Her passion for environmental education is shared by her husband Mark, who manages the laboratory technology systems. Linda Wallops, cafeteria manager for 36 years, is a local who introduces the students and visitors to a taste of the Eastern Shore every day.



MSC Executive Director Amber Parker shows off the plans for the new laboratory facilities.



Mark Bushman and Parker McMullen-Bushman prepare water sampling bottles in the lab.

Most days at MSC start with Executive Director Amber Parker meeting with the construction project team who are currently in the middle of a \$17 million expansion and renovation of the laboratory which will bring the facilities to world class standards. Nearing completion now is a 216 person dormitory, the first of six new buildings. New laboratories and housing are soon to follow. Parker expects to complete the revitalization of the site by 2011. But she says, “Don’t wait, come now. You won’t regret it!”

YOU SHOULD GO!



If you have a class, a child in a class, a college student interested in the sea, or would like an unusual vacation, check out <http://msconsortium.org/> and learn about their amazing variety of opportunities to experience the unique ecosystem of the coastal Eastern Shore. You’ll take Route 13 after the Bridge Tunnel to the Route 175 cutoff towards Chincoteague. Make a left on Atlantic Road to the entrance to the NASA/Naval Air Station, MSC is just to the west.