

# Pacifica Tribune



courtesy photo

**Through a game she created, an Ocean Shore 7th grader teaches a lesson on coral reefs to younger Ocean Shore students.**

## Ocean Shore's award-winning course

**By Jean Bartlett**  
Tribune Writer

The banner in front of Ocean Shore Elementary School defines the school's signature two-week long program: "Oceans411 – Where Ocean meets Education." But like all great things, the story is in the details.

Oceans411, formerly Oceans Week, was created more than 30 years ago by longtime Pacifican and then Ocean Shore parent Penny Keating. The program, which takes place yearly in May, was created to teach the school's K-8 students about marine environments in a hands-on way. Classes take place all over the school and there are daily rotations to Linda Mar Beach.

"It's about where we live," said Ocean Shore 3rd grade teacher and longtime Pacifican Sheila Gamble Dorn. "It's about understanding what the ocean is doing. And it follows the adage we protect what we know."

Gamble-Dorn is the coordinator of Oceans411. As she explained, the program is an immersive learning experience which runs on a seven-year theme cycle. This year's theme was Coral Reefs. Teeming with life, coral reefs are incredibly diverse underwater ecosystems.

The other themes are: Wetlands, Sharks and Prehistoric Seas, Deep Ocean, Marine Mammals, Polar Seas and Wave Zone. All of the school's K-6 students participate in and rotate through different activities on the year's theme. The majority of the school's 7th and 8th graders work in teaching roles with the younger kids. (Some might do web design or work with visiting educators.) This year that teaching included a day with some Pacifica preschoolers.

"A group of our students who had done course work with our kindergartners took those same lessons to Seaside Discovery Preschool," said 7th/8th grade teacher Jason McArthur. "Everyone loved it. Through a game and an interactive discussion, they taught the preschoolers how to take good care of coral reefs. We plan to do this again and hope to reach out to other local preschools as well."

This year's lessons were divided into the following categories: jellyfish, mangroves/seahorses, turtles, coral polyps, human impact, island life, reef communities, reef geology, and fish and symbiosis. Activities were many and varied. Some mentioned here.

Throughout the school, the school community created hallways brimming with mangroves, coral reef fish, coral polyps, a turtle lagoon and much, much more.



courtesy photo  
**Jellyfish take over this hallway.**



Jean Bartlett photo  
**During Oceans411, every school hallway is turned into an imaginative marine wonderland to explain and celebrate the year's theme. The above is one of many colorful teaching panels along the 2nd and 3rd grade corridor.**

Students designed their own "drifters." What are drifters? Jellyfish are drifters. The slow swimmers, which lack backbones, drift along the current.

The kids had the opportunity to be one of four seabirds – an Albatross, Tropicbird, Frigatebird or a Blue-footed Booby – at a Marine Play Station located at Linda Mar Beach. Seabirds are important carriers of nutrients to islands, which in turn feed into healthy coral reef ecosystems. Using the knowledge they learned about their bird, students were challenged to find their way through a school-made rendition of a real-life obstacle.

Oceans411 is a Kent Award recipient. In 2010, the school was named an Ocean Guardian School by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and was the recipient of an Ocean Guardian School federal grant. In 2010 it additionally received a grant from the San Mateo Countywide Pollution Prevention Program. In 2015 it was a recipient of a Family Gift from Pacifican Sandy Mills. In 2016, it received its first grant from The Charles A. Becker Foundation for \$10,000. The Burlingame-located foundation repeated that grant in 2017. In 2018, the Foundation provided the school with a \$15,000 grant and did the same this year.

McArthur said some of the CABF grant money goes to outreach programs such as "Stow It- Don't Throw It." This is a youth-driven, marine debris prevention project which engages youth in "combating the dangers of improperly disposed of monofilament fishing lines by assembling and distributing personal-sized fishing line recycling bins to anglers and boaters, while educating the public on sustainable fishing practices."

"San Francisco's Olympic Club donates about 300 empty tennis ball containers to us a year," McArthur said. "We put California Coastal Commission paperwork in each container which explains why fishing lines should be recycled: they are not biodegradable, and they can entangle and kill wildlife. The handout also provides the locations of the nearest California recycling station. Locally, we get these containers to harbors and fishing boats. People from across the state and in some cases, across the country, contact us for these containers to recycle their fishing lines and we send them out."

"Something else we did this year because of the CABF grant was fly coral reef specialist Dr. Rebecca Vega Thurber from Oregon to here," Gamble-Dorn said. (Vega Thurber is an Associate Professor of Microbiology at Oregon State University.) "She generously donated two assemblies for our students as well as an extra day doing mini workshops in our science room."

Along with visiting specialists and various outreach programs, money from the CABF has allowed Ocean Shore to create a professional Oceans411 website, <https://oceans411.org/oceans411/>. The website can be viewed by people all over the world.

"What we teach here and learn here annually about the marine environment is not something we want to just keep to ourselves," Gamble-Dorn said. "We want to share it and the Foundation makes that possible."

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