

Off 68/Salinas Californian

Whalefest Monterey offers fun, education

Events are Jan. 25, 26 at Old Fisherman's Wharf

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A gray whale / Provided

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Orcas frolic in Monterey Bay. / Provided

Whatever you're looking for in entertainment and education about our oceans, Whalefest has it covered from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Jan. 25 and 26 at Old Fisherman's Wharf. Sixty-foot model gray whale you actually climb inside and privately re-enact the story of Jonah? Check. Live music? Check. Remote-controlled model sailing regatta? Check. Water display by Monterey's fire boat? Got that too.

And the list of events goes on. According to Mary Alice Cerrito Fettis, president of the Fisherman's Wharf Association and chairwoman of Whalefest Monterey, its goals are to inspire, educate, empower and encourage people to explore the wonderland in our own backyard. "Whalefest brings together the organizations, institutions, nonprofits and agencies that affect Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary," she said.

Indeed, the list of 30 participating organizations reads like an oceanic Who's Who, with everyone from the American Cetacean Society and the BLUE Ocean Film Festival to the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Wahine Project jumping on board. If you're not familiar with that last group, the Wahine Project is an organization that helps young women gain access to surfing in order to build relationships, self-esteem and respect for the environment. They'll be doing beach and street cleanups Jan. 25.

Fettis noted that in order for organizations to participate, they must offer something interactive. In her words, "Just standing in a booth and handing out brochures won't cut it." That approach guarantees that both adults and children will have interesting and engaging learning opportunities. Activities include a mock whale disentanglement demonstration, an underwater remote camera from the Monterey Academy of Oceanographic Science that can be controlled by attendees, and — not for the faint of heart — shark and Humboldt squid dissections. Peggy Stap of Marine Life Studies will bring her dog, "Whiskie the Whale Spotter." Whiskie not only has great sea legs, but an unusual ability to detect the presence of whales before they spout or surface (see related article). Another unusual offering will be the art of gyotaku, in which fish are used to make prints on paper. In addition, numerous distinguished lecturers will present seminars throughout the weekend at various venues in and around the wharf. Presentations include "The

Extreme Life of the Sea: Stories about the Biggest Animals That Ever Lived”, a presentation by Dr. Steve Palumbi of Hopkins Marine Station, and screenings of movies from the BLUE Ocean Film Festival, such as “Living in Harmony with Our Oceans.” Local historian Tim Thomas will present “5,000 Years of Boom and Bust on the Monterey Bay,” tracing the history of fishing in the bay from the time of the Rumsien Ohlone Indians.

All that learning can pay off for students, too. According to Fettis, there will be a science credit program for students from elementary to university level. “We have a program that reaches across the ages, without being too simple for an adult but not so sophisticated as to be lost on children,” she said. Wharf restaurants are getting into the act, too. They’ll be offering small bites for \$3-\$5 to attendees.

A fundraiser called “Fins, Funds and Photos!” is in progress through Jan. 26 at the Museum of Monterey on the Customs House Plaza. Dozens of local photographs taken by both professional and amateur photographers from Monterey and Santa Cruz are on display. Visitors can purchase raffle tickets (one for \$5 or five for \$20) and “vote” by placing tickets in the boxes next to their favorite pictures. On Jan. 26, a drawing will be held for each photo from the tickets in the boxes. From 5-8 p.m. today (Friday, Jan.17), a reception with appetizers and music will be held at the museum to highlight the exhibition. The reception is free, donations are welcome, and wines may be purchased by the glass.

As for Whalefest’s honorees, they’ve been spotted all along the coast over the last few weeks as they migrate south to calve. We doubt that they know there’s a party in their honor — but we sure hope they decide to attend — from a distance, of course!