

The Salinas **Californian**

Abalone on the march

Event shines light on wharf's story

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Japanese American abalone divers in the Monterey Bay / Provided

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Pop Ernest and abalone shells on the Monterey Wharf / Provided

To attend

Japanese American Heritage Days will be Saturday and Sunday, May 3-4, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1 Old Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey. It is one of several wharf-involved events during the year. For more, go to montereywharf.com.

More

It'll be the past and the here and now.

It'll be history and non-history. Above all, it'll be the first-ever Japanese American Heritage Days, free family fun May 3 and 4, Saturday and Sunday, at Old Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey.

"It's all these things woven together," said Mary Alice Cerrito Fettis, president of the Old Fisherman's Wharf Association, co-sponsoring the event with the Japanese American Citizens League of the Monterey Peninsula. "We're trying to get this generation and the next to understand the story of this this area," Fettis said.

“It’s dressed up to look like fun, but it’s an educational and cultural experience, too,” Fettes added.

The event steps out to the unbroken beat of taiko drums plus many other happenings staged about the sturdy timbers of Fisherman’s Wharf. For those who know the story of the wharf, with all the many ethnic groups that have played a part, it’s a chance to renew and deepen that understanding and sense of common heritage. For those with a less firm grasp of the story, it’s a time to see, to taste, to wonder and to learn how the chapters fit together.

The learning part encompasses presentations by local historians Sandy Lydon and Tim Thomas. A waterfront guide, fisheries historian and author, Thomas had the idea for the heritage event. In support of that idea, photos of Japanese fishermen, for example, will be displayed in the Wharf Theatre. There’ll be demonstrations of origami, ikebana, bonsai and other artforms, too.

The Chinese, Spanish, Italians and many other immigrant groups played roles in the story of the wharf and harbor.

As for the abalone, that was a key interest of the Japanese early on. Then came “Pop” Ernest Doelter, the “Abalone King.” An entrepreneur and restaurateur, Doelter, in the early 1900s, developed the first abalone recipe tempting to the western palate, frying it up like a schnitzel. Doelter enlisted well-known artists Jo Mora and Armin Hansen to create menus for his “Abalone and Seafood Restaurant,” which flourished bet