

enchantment of THE SEA

Two students work at the aquarium to improve their career path in biology

Growing up in a house full of animals, living in what was practically a zoo, it was no surprise that **Tess Abrams**, 12, wanted to pursue a career in biology.

"From watching TV with my turtle, to going out and riding horses every day after school, I've always been in an environment around animals," Abrams said.

Abrams applied to an internship at the South Carolina Aquarium after hearing about it from her wildlife biology teacher, **Diane Krishon**.

"One of my favorite things about Tess is [that] her passion for the environment is abounding. She'll learn everything and want to teach it. She just has that need, that gift," Krishon said.

"She sailed through [the internship]. She was a good fit. She'll be a good fit anywhere."

Abrams began the internship during her senior year. At the aquarium, there is no average day for Abrams.

"How my schedule's set up is every half hour, I move somewhere new. One shift, I might lead stingray feedings at the shallows, or I have an animal walking around engaging with guests, or I could be in our sea turtle hospital with a loggerhead costume on breakdancing with children," Abrams said.

Her position in the internship is being an educator, so Abrams interacts with the general public frequently. Once a visitor of the aquarium, she now enjoys being in the same role as those who taught the guests. Also, she finds that she is always learning from people and experiences around her.

"[I'm] learning every second of the day from my coworkers. Some of them are marine mammal

researchers, do outreach with the local schools, or are on the sea turtle vet team. Maybe they've done research on sea urchins in St. Thomas. One got back from doing shark research in South Africa," Abrams said. "You can ask them anything, and they're so passionate and want to tell you all about it."

Not only does Abrams get to know her coworkers, but she gets to know the animals. Each animal has a different personality.

"The normal guest walking through the aquarium won't get to know every individual animal. One of our snakes yawns [at guests]. I'm like, when he yawns you'll see [he doesn't have fangs]. He does it on cue sometimes. We've got a pelican who's our punky teen right now. He nips children, eats the fish, and chases around other birds," Abrams said.

Among the animals at the aquarium, Abrams loves a common octopus named Squishy. Before her shifts, Abrams comes in half an hour early to sit with Squishy. Abrams can put her hand out, and Squishy will come up to greet her.

"She changes color and texture. Sometimes she'll feel spunky and add devil horns or start flashing colors. [She has] three to four puzzles every day that she has to solve to get her food. [When puzzles are too hard,] she likes throwing them at the flounder," Abrams said. "The two oyster toadfish had over 100 eggs. Squishy didn't like that their eggs took up space in her hidey-hole, so she ate them all. She loves messing with her roommates."

Emma Tiberian, 11, volunteers alongside Abrams, but as an exhibit guide at the aquarium. A sea turtle named Queen caught her attention as an aquarium

favorite. Queen was in the sea turtle hospital until she was released a few months ago.

"[Sea turtles are] just really gentle. A lot of bad things happen to them. Queen was in the turtle hospital for a very long time, and it was a really big deal when she was released. She was with us for so long, so it was exciting. She could finally get out," Tiberian said.

Tiberian has been interested in marine biology and conservation education for a long time. Specifically, a scuba diving experience helped inspire her to learn more about the career path.

"A few years ago, I went scuba diving. Now I want to get a scuba certification. We were in Cozumel, Mexico," Tiberian said.

With a clear and close view of the ocean floor, Tiberian could see a sea turtle and sea urchins resting on the ground.

"There was also a seahorse, and that was probably the most exciting part to me because we were able to put our hand under it and it was right there," Tiberian said.

When they cross paths at the aquarium, Tiberian and Abrams discuss their shared interest in marine biology. The internship and volunteering opportunities have helped both of them get closer to their biology-oriented goals for the future.

"People from all walks of life come through our doors," Abrams said. "Sometimes it brings me to tears because [you can tell some people are] worn down and want a pick-me-up. To get to be that person [to brighten their day] is so amazing."

**Story by Elise Lo
Designer Eva Andrus**



"Her passion for the environment is abounding. She'll learn everything and want to teach it."

favorite ANIMALS

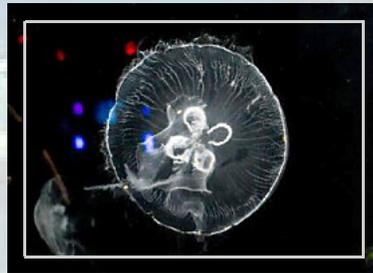
Marine Biology students have special affinity for certain sea creatures



STINGRAY: "Stingrays don't have teeth, so they use grinding plates in their mouth to break up their food, which I think is so weird, but cool," Potter said; photo by I. daniher



Maggie Potter, 11



JELLYFISH: "Jellyfish don't have brains, and the jellyfish Portuguese Man O' War actually isn't a jellyfish, but four different organisms living together," Bagwell said; photo by I. daniher



George Bagwell, 12