



Information:

Jonathan Witt, (949) 496-2274, ext. 330

Ocean Institute to Welcome 2,500 5th Grade Scientists in Training for January “Kids’ Conferences on Watersheds”

Dana Point, CALIF., December 19, 2007 – Teaching America’s next generation of young people about our oceans and the importance of protecting them and their inhabitants is at the heart of the Ocean Institute’s mission. Therefore, the Institute launched its annual watershed program in 2003 to teach 5th grade students from the Southland about the science of the watersheds, an area of land which runs into a body of water such as a river, lake or the ocean. Often, residents of a watershed are careless in such everyday choices as how to wash the car or fertilize the lawn, which ultimately contribute to pollution on our beaches and harm the wildlife that live along our coastlines.

Over 2,500 students from 31 schools who are participating in the Ocean Institute’s 2007-08 Watershed program will visit the Institute January 8 - 28, 2008 for the Kids’ Conferences on Watersheds. The conference provides these young people with the opportunity to present the findings of their studies in the program to their peers, with local elected officials and professionals in the field listening in.

The program began in September and October, when 5th grade students visited the Institute to learn about watersheds and ways to reduce pollution in our oceans. Topics studied include meteorology, internal systems, water chemistry, water cycle, investigation techniques and watershed science. They then returned to their individual schools to continue their studies, collect data and prepare their information for public presentations. The Kids’ Conferences in January is the highlight of the program, when the children return to share what they learned with each other. Some students present their findings to local businesses and public officials, in hopes of encouraging them to be better stewards of our ocean environment.

“We’ve been pleased with the results of the Watershed program,” observed Jonathan Witt, Watershed Education Program Coordinator. “It’s an ideal fit with our mission at the Institute, ocean preservation through education.”

Eighty-four classes of 5th grade students participated from 21 cities, 12 of which are in Orange County. They were taught in Ocean Institute laboratories, as well as on-board the Institute’s *R/V Sea Explorer*. Teachers from the classes participating were trained in inservice classes at the Institute last summer, and returned to their classrooms to prepare their students for their visit to the Institute.

Guests from various community organizations, including city councils, school boards, non-profits and county officials, will be invited to attend the Kids’ Conferences to discuss the research projects and current watershed issues with the students during roundtable discussions.

The Watershed program is made possible through the generous support of Miocean, the Toyota USA Foundation, SIMA, Orange County Community Foundation, and the Kenneth and Eileen Norris Foundation.

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Founded in 1977, the Ocean Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to ocean preservation through education, setting the standard for educational excellence and serving as a leading resource for universities, museums, teachers and all others seeking to increase their knowledge of the ocean. The Ocean Institute is open to the general public on weekends, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Cost: \$6 adults, \$4 children (ages 4-12), Ocean Institute members free. Unique maritime and ocean-themed items are available in the Chambers Gallery everyday, 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. Institute address: 24200 Dana Point Harbor Dr., Dana Point. Website: www.ocean-institute.org.

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