Aquarium Celebrates National Volunteer Week

Honors Three Outstanding Volunteers for Their Dedicated Service

The Monterey Bay Aquarium kicks off National Volunteer week by announcing the exceptional volunteers who earned the 2017 Lucile S. Packard Memorial Award and Youth Volunteer Awards. The aquarium celebrates Mary Martha Waltz and student volunteers Dylan Williams and Yazmin Ochoa as individuals "whose dedication and service exemplify Mrs. Packard's lifelong commitment to volunteerism." The aquarium will officially present the awards at its annual volunteer gala on Saturday, May 13.

The three are among more than 1,400 individual volunteers who contributed more than 170,000 hours of service in 2016. Since the aquarium opened in 1984, more than 9,000 individuals have given 3.8 million hours to the nonprofit organization, in support of its mission to inspire conservation of the ocean.

Carmel resident Mary Martha Waltz has dedicated over 6,000 hours of service over the past 14 years, supporting almost every department at the aquarium. She is an integral part of the education team, assisting with Teen Conservation Leaders, School Programs, Home School Days and more.

Waltz also works behind the scenes with animal husbandry, where "no task is too tough or small—from scrubbing algae with tooth brushes (she brought her own from home) to feeding out buckets of brine shrimp and algae—Mary Martha does it all with a smile," says senior aquarist David Smith.

Waltz continuously seeks to communicate the aquarium mission, whether on the aquarium floor or behind the scenes, with a tireless commitment to inspire others to love the ocean as much as she does.

Lucile S. Packard Youth Volunteer award recipient Dylan Williams joined the aquarium as a Teen Conservation Leader and volunteer guide in the fall of 2014. During his three years with the aquarium he has served 892 hours - despite commuting from his home in San Juan Bautista - and is one of the few Teen Conservation Leaders who has completed training to earn the status of a volunteer guide.

"Dylan has a great sense of humor, and he combines it with his vast knowledge, his love for the ocean, and his dedication to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, to share with guests in a very relatable way” says education specialist McKenzie Miller.

Youth award recipient Yazmin Ochoa, from Salinas, has volunteered 239 hours with the Teen Conservation Leader program, and continuously seeks out opportunities to gain leadership skills and fuel her spark for service. One such opportunity was serving as part of a five-member team that designed, planned and implemented a two-day Teen Summit. The Teen Summit was a huge success thanks to Ochoa's efforts, resulting in over 100 teens taking action in developing citizen-science conservation projects. She'll be bringing her talents to prestigious college Dartmouth next year.

Bilingual education specialist Jennifer Keliher says, “Yazmin exudes enthusiasm and confidence in everything she does, allowing her to provide an exceptional and memorable experience to guests and program participants alike.”

Williams and Ochoa plan to attend college upon graduation from high school this year, and will benefit from the scholarship that is included with the Lucile S. Packard Youth Volunteer Award.

Mrs. Packard, along with her husband David Packard, made the initial gift to build the aquarium. She was the driving force behind creation of the aquarium's internationally acclaimed volunteer program.

Increasingly, the aquarium offers volunteer opportunities tailored to fit the demands of busy life, work and school schedules - whether it's serving as guides working with aquarium guests, helping with sea otter, shark and tuna research, scuba diving to clean exhibits, assisting with visiting school groups, or supporting the global work of the aquarium's Seafood Watch program.

As one staff members said: "Volunteers not only make the Monterey Bay Aquarium better, they make it possible."

To learn more about volunteer opportunities, visit montereybayaquarium.org/volunteer.