

## Oceanic science students from Sandy visit San Francisco

BY LISA K. ANDERSON

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**The water was calm, the breeze was light, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. The weather was unusual for San Francisco in mid-October, but the group's sighting was even more unusual.**

As 33 Sandy High School students and their teacher, Andy Wex, chartered a 78-foot sailing schooner, a minke whale surfaced 20 feet away.

"It was the real show-stopper," Wex said.

This is the fourth year Wex has traveled with oceanic science students to San Francisco for a fall trip. Members of Aquanauts, a club extension of Wex's class, have also attended the past three years.

During their long weekend in San Francisco, Wex and the students not only chartered the sailing schooner and meandered through Fisherman's Wharf, they visited the Marine Mammal Center, a state-of-the-art, internationally renowned marine mammal rehabilitation center. They also went to the California Academy of Sciences, "the only place on the planet with an aquarium, a planetarium, a natural history museum and a four-story rainforest all under one roof."

"I am having the time of my life watching them blossom on their own," Wex said of his students.

At the marine center, staff described necropsies, or autopsies for non-human bodies. "We've done them," Sandy High students responded, referring to their experience when they examined a harbor porpoise and seal at Portland State University this past February.

The students continued to describe their hypotheses about how the young porpoise and seal could have died. Impressed, the tour guide told Wex she wanted to attend his high school.

"It was nice having some veterans along," Wex said. "They amped up the excitement because they knew what they were in store for."

Kyle Reed and Crystal Hokanson are two of those veterans.

Reed, a 17-year-old senior, has dreamed of becoming a biologist and running a pet shop from an early age. But it was Wex's class, he says, that cemented his interest in marine biology.

"He has a magical way of making anything interesting," Reed said. "Sometimes it's teaching in an unorthodox way with an Australian accent and Koala puppet."

Reed took Wex's oceanic science class his junior year, and has been an active member of Aquanauts. Though he attended last year's trip to San Francisco, Reed took special note of wildlife interaction this time.

"I realized how much all of it depends upon little things like plankton," he said.

Hokanson, a 17-year-old senior and president of Aquanauts, saw during the trip how great her class' knowledge is.

She recognized all the animals she saw, including her favorites: the cuddle fish and the leafy seadragon.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO / SANDY POST  
Sandy High students hoist the sail of Freda B. on their mid-October sailing expedition.

Both Reed and Hokanson plan to pursue marine biology in college.

Wex and his students will give a presentation about their trip at the Nov. 14 or Dec. 12 school board meeting. To confirm which date, call the Oregon Trail School District at 503-668-5541 in the next couple weeks.

Additionally, Wex would like to create an oceanic science and Aquanauts foundation that would help sponsor students' trips with scholarships and transportation assistance. Anyone interested in assisting Wex with ideas is encouraged to contact him at [Andy.Wex@ortrail.k12.or.us](mailto:Andy.Wex@ortrail.k12.or.us).

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