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NOAA REPORT



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NOAA Volunteers Led Discussions



NOAA employees (left to right) Jill Stevenson, Elisabeth Broughton and Ida Hakkarinen served as volunteer instructors for the Presidential Classroom for Young Americans Feb. 3-9.

Presidential Classroom Gives Students Insiders' Views

—By Crystal Straughn

When more than 300 high-school students from all over the country traveled to Washington, D.C., in February to spend a week exploring the American political process first-hand, three NOAA employees were waiting for them.

Jill Stevenson, Elisabeth Broughton and Ida Hakkarinen were there to serve as volunteer instructors for the science, technology and public policy programs of the Presidential Classroom Scholars Program, a non-profit civics education organization that since 1968 has taken students behind the

scenes of the nation's capital for seminars and discussions featuring members of Congress, presidential appointees, federal employees, journalists and other Washington insiders and names in the news.

Selected from a competitive pool of hundreds of applicants, the three NOAA employees joined 13 other volunteer professionals from government, business and education who led groups of 40 students, helping them understand current, pressing issues such as environmental policy, the role of the media in a democracy, privacy, personal freedom and technology.

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Researchers See Right Whale Baby Boomlet in Atlantic

—By Nancy O'Donnell

A right whales "baby boomlet" is being greeted with cautious enthusiasm by researchers studying the world's most endangered large whales.

By mid-February, at least 20 calves had been documented in the only known calving grounds for right whales—off the coast of Georgia and Florida—by New England Aquarium researchers who analyzed aerial surveys of the whales.

Last year, there was only one reported right whale birth.

Right whales calves, each weighing a ton and measuring some 15 feet, can be accurately described as bouncing babies. Observers describe the pale gray newborns as "bobbing like corks in the water" before their color darkens and they gain the ability to submerge.

Once numbering in the thousands, the North Atlantic right whale population now hovers around 350. Right whales, which can reach lengths of 60 feet and weigh up to 100 tons, were nearly decimated because of their propensity to stay afloat after being harpooned, becoming "the right whale" for hunting.

Today, the two biggest known causes of death for adult right whales are collisions with ships and entrapment by stationary fishing gear such as long lines and lobster traps.

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Classroom

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Stevenson, a fisheries management specialist with the Fishery Service's Highly Migratory Species Division in St. Petersburg, Fla., facilitated debates on government policy and the role of media in democracy.

"The program was an excellent opportunity for students to learn about their government and how it works and to learn about the meaning of public service from federal employees," she said.

One of the goals of the science, technology and public policy program is to give students a first-hand look at the political responses to change brought about by scientific advances. Students examined the issues that involve technology and public policy, such as environmental quality, the future of space exploration and the telecommunication revolution.

Hakkarinen, meteorologist with the NESDIS Office of the Chief Information Officer in Silver Spring, Md., served as a volunteer for the sixth consecutive year.

"I find Presidential Classroom to be a wonderful learning experience for both the students and instructors," Hakkarinen said.

"Each year, I have the opportunity to meet young people who are extremely bright in the field of science and technology and who demonstrate a passion for the issues facing our globe. For many of them, the opportunity to witness government 'up-close and personal' in Washington, D.C., makes their civics textbook learning come alive," she said.

Highlights of the week included a private tour of the White House, a seminar and tour of the National Security Agency at Fort Meade, Md., and a seminar at the National Academy of Sciences.

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NOAA Units Support Ocean Sciences Bowl

—By Michael Quigley and Erica Van Coverden

For the fourth year in a row, NOAA units have supported regional competitions of the National Ocean Sciences Bowl, which pits teams of high school students from around the country in "quiz bowl" matches testing their knowledge of Great Lakes and ocean science and technology and related social science.

The nineteen regional competitions are aimed at raising student interest in coastal and ocean science, while encouraging teachers to use lake and ocean processes in teaching fundamentals of biology, physics, chemistry, geology and math.

On Feb. 10, ten high school teams from Michigan and two from Ohio squared off at the fourth annual Midwest regional competition held at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The competition was co-hosted by NOAA's Great Lakes Environ-

mental Research Laboratory, Michigan Sea Grant, the NOAA Cooperative Institute for Limnology and Ecosystems Research, the University of Michigan and Smith Group JJR.

Fourteen laboratory employees and four employees of the cooperative institute volunteered as moderators and science and rules judges for the competitions.

This year's Midwest regional winning team, Port Hope, Mich., High School lost to Huron High of Ann Arbor in the early double elimination round, but later returned to edge out Huron in two successive victories.

On Feb. 10 and 11, fourteen employees of NOAA's Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory in Miami, Fla., served as moderators and judges for the Florida regional bowl.

The University of Miami organ-

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Erica Van Coverden/NOAA

During a break in the ocean sciences bowl competition in Miami, NOAA volunteers (front row, left to right) Nick Carrasco, Chris Landsea and Maria Bello are joined by (rear row, left to right) volunteer Chauncy Kelly, a Ph.D. candidate at the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, and Roger Simons, a student volunteer from the MAST Academy.

Employee, Team Member of the Month

—By Dane Konop

NOAA has named the first recipients of two new monthly awards for “sustained effort in advancing NOAA’s mission.”

John W. Hill, an electronics engineer at the NOAA Aircraft Operations Center at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, is the first recipient of the employee of the month award.

Danny Dillon, a contract employee on the staff of the National Ocean Service’s chief information officer in Silver Spring, Md., is the first recipient of the team member of the month award.

The employee of the month award honors an outstanding employee chosen from among all occupations and grade levels, except members of the Senior Executive Service and office directors.

The team member of the month award will “give credit to the outstanding people who make our NOAA programs a success but are not actually federal employees,” acting Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere Scott Gudes said in announcing the creation of the awards in February.

Winners receive a congratulatory letter and certificate from the NOAA administrator.

Selection criteria in both categories include completion of a short-term project or special assignment which requires a unique or innovative approach, developing and implementing procedures that enhance office productivity and efficiency, enhancing line or staff office morale through teamwork, exhibiting flexibility in meeting new challenges, providing front line customer service which reflects favorably on the office, and improving public awareness and/or understanding of NOAA programs.



*Niki Hill
Employee of the month John W. Hill.*

Employee of the month John W. Hill is the lead systems engineer on NOAA’s G-IV jet aircraft, which collects high altitude information on hurricanes and other storms.

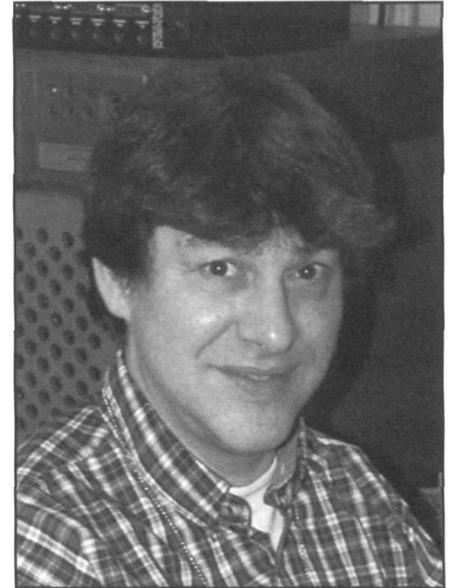
Hill led the effort to replace almost all the computer hardware for the G-IV’s meteorological data system and to change its operating system software. Recently, Hill coded and installed new computer algorithms on the G-IV that allow the on-board meteorologist and flight crew to identify turbulent regions below the aircraft, thus improving flight safety.

Hill joined NOAA in July 1996, following graduation from Montana State University. He also served in the Air Force in Montana.

Hill says he always wanted to fly. “I like mechanics, electronics, flying and weather” he said, “and it all comes together in this job.”

Hill says what he likes best about his job is “the ability to be creative, to form ideas, put them into action and then see the results” of his work.

Hill, his wife, Niki, and 9-year-old stepson, Hayes, live in Valrico, Fla.



*Hugh Johnson/NOAA
Team member of the month Danny Dillon.*

The team member of the month, Danny Dillon, is a contract worker employed by RSIS, Inc.

Dillon is the e-mail postmaster for the National Ocean Service, in Silver Spring, Md. “I’ve got 1,600 users in NOS. I make sure that the service is available anytime that the users want it—which is all the time,” Dillon said.

NOAA has been working to convert from many different e-mail systems to the Netscape messenger system and to do so without major disruptions or breaks in service. Dillon led the National Ocean Service transition to Netscape and supported the other NOAA line office e-mail administrators with their transitions.

“Most of my time was taken with the migration from the 20 different mail systems they had in NOS to consolidate under one mail system. We used NOS to pilot what NOAA was going to do. I implemented the NOAA solution about a year prior to NOAA implementing it,” he said.

Dillon, his wife, Doris, and 16-year-old son, Cassel, live in McLean, Va. ☺

Focus On...

Habitat Restoration

—By Brenda Rupli, Robin Bruckner and Jennifer Koss

Restoration is habitat forming, says Scott Gudes, NOAA's acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere.

At a Capitol Hill briefing Feb. 9, Gudes led the call for national and regional partners to join the NOAA Restoration Center in community-based habitat restoration work.

"We are open and ready for business," he said. "We are actively seeking new partnerships and project proposals in 2001 under the Community-Based Restoration Program."

Created in 1996, the program has operated on a shoe-string budget of between \$250,000 and

\$450,000 per year to support local level restoration in coastal communities.

Then, in 2000, "Congress gave the program a much needed boost, and we had \$2 million to distribute for grass-roots restoration projects," said Rollie Schmitt, director of the NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation.

Congress provided an additional \$6 million for fisheries habitat restoration in 2001, making last month's announcement of \$8 million for community-based restoration funds possible.

The concept behind community-based restoration is simple: develop strong partnerships to help communities accomplish meaningful habitat restoration that simultaneously promotes an abiding conservation ethic and stewardship for living marine resources.

The NOAA Restoration Center develops partnerships at the national, regional and local levels, bringing together community organizations, not-for-profit groups, government, educational institutions, youth conservation corps and other stakeholders to work on restoration projects.

The center's role is to help identify sound projects, strengthen their development and implementation with support from the community and local interest groups, and generate long-term national and regional partnerships to provide funds and other support for community-based restoration efforts around the country.

Proposals for projects are requested several times each year, either directly by the center or through its numerous partners.

NOAA Fisheries field staff then make site visits and meet with potential grantees to answer questions and guide them through the restoration process. Proposals undergo a competitive review, and projects are selected based on technical merit, level of community involvement, ecological benefit to marine and anadromous fish habitats, and partnership opportunities.

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Rick Wantuck/NOAA

Student volunteers from Petaluma, Calif., restored Adobe Creek with NOAA assistance.



Jennifer Koss/NOAA

NOAA volunteers gather for a group picture during a restoration/cleanup of wetlands at Fort McHenry in Baltimore last April.

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Last year, national partners including the American Sportfishing Association, the National Fisheries Institute and Restore America's Estuaries each contributed project funds, which were matched again at the local level.

Mark Wolf-Armstrong, president of Restore America's Estuaries, said, "With strategic alliances like these, we embark together on the important journey to restore the health of our marine ecosystems, where we live intertwined with the natural world."

Technical assistance, land donations or conservation easements, workforce support and volunteer labor for project implementation and monitoring are all ways partners may contribute.

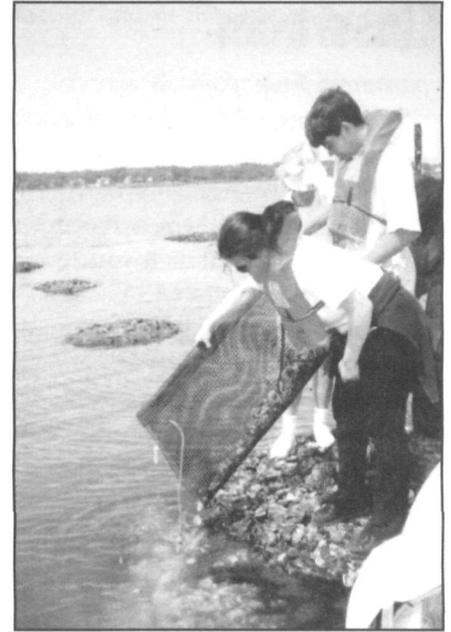
"Our experience shows that local partners leverage our grant funds with an average of \$3 to \$5 for every NOAA dollar invested. So we are really talking about getting \$24 million to \$40 million of restoration work this year as a result of

this program," Gudes said.

Today, NOAA funding supports 180 projects in 25 states. Hundreds more projects are expected to receive awards and begin in 2001. While individually small, these projects are beginning to have a cumulative impact on improving the health of the nation's marine, estuarine, coastal and riparian habitats.

This year, support for individual projects will range from \$1,000 to up to \$200,000. National and regional partnerships will range from \$100,000 to as much as \$4 million.

"I have taken part in several community-based habitat restoration efforts," Gudes said. "I think our NOAA habitat programs are addressing what the American public wants. Community-based habitat restoration resonates with everyone—the commercial industry, the sportfishing industry, academia and the environmental groups. They all come together because it is in everyone's interest to restore the environment." ☺



*Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Volunteers help restore an oyster reef in Chesapeake Bay by planting an oyster garden.*



*Peter Clark/Tampa Bay Watch
Volunteers plant grasses to help restore a wetland in Tampa Bay.*



*Jennifer Koss/NOAA
Scott Gudes demonstrates proper use of a fertilizer dispenser during a Fort McHenry wetlands cleanup.*

Classroom

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Small groups of students also visited the National Institutes of Health, the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va., the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute in Bethesda, Md., and NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md.

Many of the instructors were impressed with the students' knowledge of government policy and environmental issues.

"One student was particularly knowledgeable about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change meetings in Europe," Hakkarinen said. "I was impressed with this level of knowledge for a 16- to 17-year-old. While the student may not have had all the technical intricacies named correctly, she understood the big

picture and she had a savvy about the policy issues at hand."

Broughton, a biological technician with the Fisheries Service's Woods Hole, Mass., Laboratory, has been volunteering with Presidential Classroom for three years.

"I welcome the chance to interact with some of the top high school students in our nation," Broughton said. "They provide me with a healthy dose of enthusiasm, some new perspectives and an insight into the thought processes of students and young adults," she said.

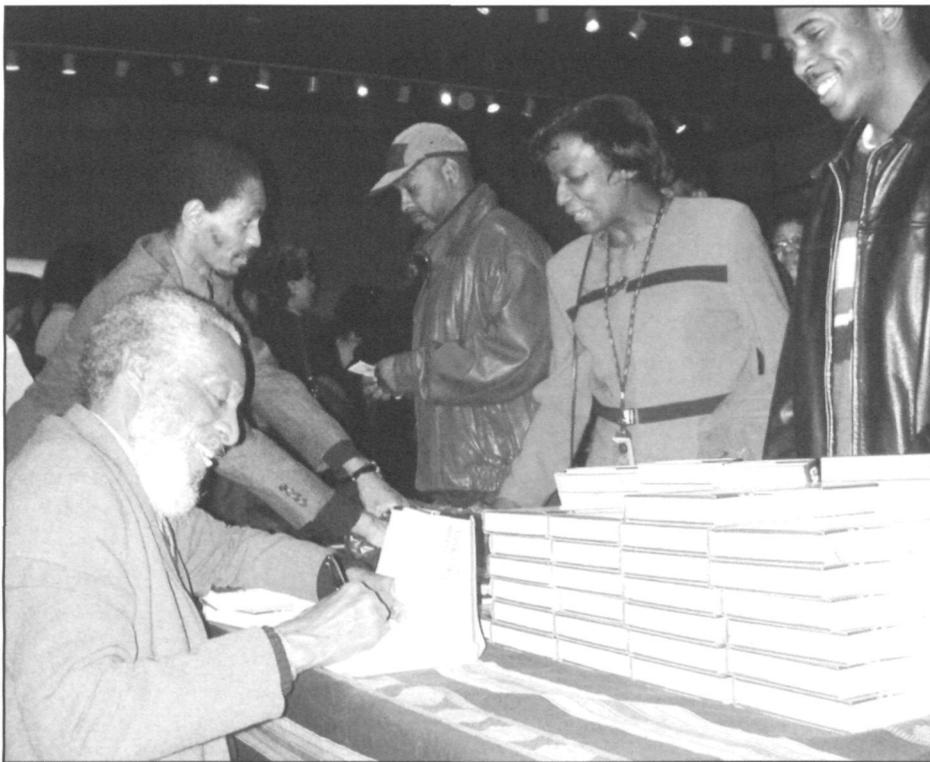
"The program has been a learning experience for me as well," Broughton said. "Working with my co-instructors, sitting in committee meetings on the Hill and listening to our seminar speakers has given me a much wider view of our government. For me it has been a constant learning experience that I

look forward to repeating," she said.

After participating in Presidential Classroom for the first time, Stevenson has recommended the program to other students and colleagues. "I learned a great deal from the students and their diverse backgrounds. They were smart, enthusiastic and involved in their communities. Being a volunteer instructor was an amazing experience for me and a great way to show off NOAA's programs," she said.

Hakarinen said, "My fellow instructors are outstanding professionals who are terrific role models for the students and demonstrate the values of dedicated federal civil servants. I'm honored to be able to represent NOAA and engage students in the possibilities they have for a career in government service." ☺

Dick Gregory Speaks at NOAA



Dane Konop/NOAA

Sponsored by Blacks in Government, comedian and social activist Dick Gregory signs copies of his latest book following an insightful, unique, occasionally ribald and often hilarious address to NOAA employees on family values in the Silver Spring, Md., Metro Center auditorium Feb. 14, one of a number of African-American History Month events at NOAA.

Ocean Bowl

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ized the two day event, which featured 22 high school teams from Florida competing for a top prize of one week on board Royal Caribbean's new cruise ship, *Explorer of the Seas*. The winning team, Eau Galley High School of Melbourne, will help operate two research laboratories on *Explorer of the Seas* during their cruise.

The winning regional teams from Port Hope and Eau Galley will join the other regional winning teams in a national finals competition in Miami April 1-3.

The National Ocean Sciences Bowl is hosted by the Consortium for Oceanographic Research and Education and the National Marine Educators Association.

Federal sponsors include NOAA, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Sea Grant College Program, the National *continued on page 8*

Right Whales

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Each year from about mid-December through March, right whales meander down from their feeding grounds near Cape Cod to give birth in warmer waters. Along the way the whales pass through NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary and major shipping routes and fishing grounds, drawing the attention of multi-agency aerial survey teams who scan the water for sight of mother and calf pairs.

Once spotted, the teams relay whale positions to nearby ships to protect the whales from collisions with the massive vessels.

Christopher Slay, a scientist leading the early warning system aerial team for the New England Aquarium, calls this the best calving season in five years.

"We all are really excited about the births," says Slay. "After three years of seeing only one to maybe five calves in a season, you start to wonder if you're fighting a losing battle and that resources might be better directed towards a species that has a fighting chance. The

births this year renew our resolve to continue working for the preservation of the species."

Scientists studying the marine mammals believe that a drop in plankton that whales feed on in recent years may have contributed to fewer births.

This year, five survey teams are on the trail of the right whales: the New England Aquarium, the Florida Marine Research Institution, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, a combined team from Georgia and Florida, and a team led by William McClellan of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

tive success of the northern right whales.

Slay describes the area his team monitors as the "epicenter of the calving ground."

"Early warning system surveys are flown every flyable day," says Slay. "The frequency of these flights is important because most of the ship traffic in the calving ground converges in this area, inbound or outbound, for one of three commercial ports or two Navy bases."

The warning system provided by the aerial surveys is credited with helping a huge ship avoid colliding with a right whale and calf during

"The births this year renew our resolve to continue working for the preservation of the species."—New England Aquarium researcher Christopher Slay.

In previous years, NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary has assisted on the water.

Slay says the aquarium hopes to collaborate with Gray's Reef the sanctuary in future research activities. These studies would aim to answer questions regarding the population structure and reproduc-

this year's calving season.

During a routine whale survey, the New England Aquarium team spotted a mother and calf pair heading into the path of a vessel. The team relayed the information to the Coast Guard and the harbor pilot, allowing the ship's captain to change course in time to avoid the whales.

News of a whale boomlet was especially encouraging to Gray's Reef sanctuary manager Reed Bohne, who has taken part in earlier surveys.

"In 1999, when we joined with NOAA Fisheries and the New England Aquarium to study the behavioral characteristics of a right whale and her calf, there was great concern about the extremely low numbers of whales in the calving grounds," says Bohne. "In 2000, the numbers were even lower.

"While it's comforting to see the rebound this year," Bohne adds, "the fate of the right whale remains precarious, and our commitment to the protection of this species must remain strong." ☺



Candice Emmons/NEAq

Mother and calf right whales return to NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary.

Daniel J. Basta, a 21-year veteran of NOAA's National Ocean Service, is the new director of the National Marine Sanctuary Program.

Carl P. Staton, who helped bring real-time satellite data to weather forecasters more than 20 years ago and last year guided the transition of the newest high-speed supercomputer into the weather modeling process, was named the new chief information officer for the National Weather Service.

News Briefs

David Rodenhuis, former director of the Aviation Weather Center, and **Dale Branch**, meteorologist-in-charge at the FAA Air Route Traffic Control Center in Minneapolis, Minn., have received the 44th annual Aerospace Laurels Award in the commercial air transport category from *Aviation Week & Space Technology*. The award honors individuals and teams that have made significant contributions to aerospace.

"Our Seas and Our Skies: NOAA's 30th Anniversary," a video produced by **Marc Kagan** of the Office of Public and Constituent Affairs, won a first place Gold Screen Award from the National Association of Government Communicators.

The *NOAA Coastal Services Center 2000 Annual Report* won a second place Blue Pencil Award in the brochure category from the National Association of Government Communicators.

Weather Service Receives Millennium Award



Brian Mitchell/NOAA

The Great Lakes Carriers Association has honored the National Weather Service with its Millennium Award for upgrades to the marine weather system that provides forecasts and other information to U.S. flag vessels plying the Great Lakes. **William Comeaux** (left), meteorologist-in-charge of the Cleveland forecast office, and Cleveland warning coordination meteorologist **Gary Garnet** (right), accept the award from **Rick Harkins**, the association's vice president of operations.

Ocean Bowl

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Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, the National Ocean Service, the National Weather Service, the Office of Naval Research, the Oceanographer

of the Navy, the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Geological Survey and NASA.

Private sector sponsors include the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Center for Marine Conservation and the Anteon Corporation. ☺

"TIROS: 40 Years of Discovery," a video directed by **Marc Kagan**, received a first place Golden Eagle Award in the science and technology category from CINE, a non-profit organization that recognizes the work of outstanding producers, directors and craftspeople in the American film and video industry. The video also won a National Association of Government Communicators honorable mention Gold Screen Award in the documentary category.

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