

VIEWPOINT | Camp Casey a delight for Whidbey children

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By **ROBYN MYERS**

Of the many beauties I've seen in this position over the past seven years at Camp Casey, a child's wonder and growth is at the top. With the many classes we teach that offer engagement with the outdoors, I am never without joy when a child discovers something unique. The delight on a child's face when they touch or spy a creature, plant or wildlife is inspiring. I'm pretty proud to offer this opportunity to locals, as well as thousands of others who visit us from the region during my tenure at Camp Casey.

Whidbey has many fascinating natural environments surrounding it, but I believe the most diverse and complex habitat is hidden from view. Our Sea Lab probes the biology of the depths by showcasing local marine life and teaching the importance of conservation. The lab features dozens of aquariums that house fascinating creatures such as sea urchins, sea stars, sea cucumbers, and last year even a pregnant octopus who was taking up residence in a discarded bleach bottle! This discovery became a startling visual observation for students to personally witness the importance of keeping trash out of our waters. The class is taught by local Keith Ludeman, who has been teaching at Camp Casey for 30-plus years. He's even seen some of his pupils become teachers and return with their students!

Keith also teaches a class with a hands-on opportunity to discover how the Sea Lab acquires some of its inhabitants through the Beach Seine class. After the net is pulled ashore, Keith takes out the creatures captured and teaches about each, one by one. Many of the animals collected are transported to the Sea Lab, while others are returned to the water.

As Keith has slowed down his walking, he's trained our new teacher TJ to deliver guided Forest and Meadow Walks that introduce students to the exceptionally diverse habitats nearby. I've enjoyed trekking on these with students who find the fun in such nature as slug slime. One only has to walk behind two sixth-grade boys to remember the fun found in nature. The varied landscape of the trail provides the perfect opportunity for the instructor to teach students about the different plants and animals that inhabit the area as it goes through the heritage forest and the prairie land nearby. Some

of the plants are endangered species or invasive species, which our local EcoNet assists with identifying. Some schools spend time volunteering with local agencies to eradicate an area of invasive species.

As an Oak Harbor High School graduate and former student at Broadview Elementary, I so enjoy welcoming back our local school children for day trips to these classes. The Sea Lab, Beach Seine and Forest/Meadow Walks are available for registration through schools and non-profit organizations. We also will be offering another open house on Friday, June 19 and the Sea Lab will be open with Ludeman teaching continued conservation and care for our earth and its inhabitants.

For details, email campcasey@spu.edu or call Robyn Myers at (360) 678-5050. Also, visit <http://gocampcasey.org> and <http://facebook.com/gocampcasey>.

Editor's note: Myers is the manager of the Camp Casey Conference Center on Central Whidbey.

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