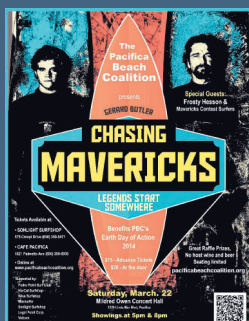


INSIDE

'Chasing Mavericks'

Public invited to screening of documentary of big wave surfers

PG. 8



El Granada's Flavors serves up comfort food

Coastside eatery now in new, larger Mid-coast location.

PG. 4



PHOTO BY ROB CALA
Reef with sunflower anemone and people walking

Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

Training future marine ecologists and inspiring everyone else

BY JANE NORTHROP
COASTAL CONNECTIONS

Half Moon Bay High School science teacher Joseph Cen-

toni grew up with the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

A native of Half Moon Bay, he was a junior ranger at Fitzgerald when former

ranger Bob Breen ran the program.

"It's what I love about the Coastside. You get to see this amazing diversity

of animals. Every time you go out, you get to see new things you've never seen before," he said.

Breen taught a marine

ecology class at Half Moon Bay High that Centoni took

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Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is Midcoast treasure

coastal connections

FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Welcome to the newest edition of *Coastal Connections*, a new monthly tabloid for and by the people of Pacifica, the Midcoast and Half Moon Bay.

For those who haven't seen it yet, *Coastal Connections* is a Bay Area News Group publication, a new sister publication of the long-popular *Pacific Tribune* which has been serving the Coast since 1957.

The monthly tabloid is being direct mailed to 27,000 households stretching from northern Pacifica, through the Midcoast and Half Moon Bay.

This month features a story about the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach which offers a plethora of training opportunities for budding marine ecologists as well as an environmental experience for the public that is second to none.

Also, read about Flavor, an El Granada restaurant that serves up tasty comfort food in a new, larger location featuring second-floor waterfront dining and a first floor premium bar and lounge.

Every month, *Coastal Connections* highlights top stories and photos, business features, community and entertainment news and profiles throughout the Coastal region, as well as themed advertising specials.

We recently featured both the Pacific Coast Fog Fest, Half Moon Bay Art & Pumpkin Festival as well as restaurants that patronize local growers for a farm-fresh dining experience.

Future issues will focus on women in business, women and politics and other stories of interest to all segments of the Coastside communities.

We are pleased at the positive reception from residents on both sides of the tunnels who enjoy calling the Coastside home.

If you'd like to contribute, contact the editor directly at elarsen@bayareanewsgroup.com. Tips and suggestions are also welcome. Email the editor or drop us a note at our offices at 59 Bill Drake Way, Pacifica, Calif. 94044.

Look for us in your mailbox and in key locations on the Coastside.

This is your publication. Enjoy.

— Elaine Larsen



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5/ County News

8/ Community

12/ Environment

13/ Profile

Send us your news tips

Is there a feature, profile or news story you'd like to read about in *Coastal Connections*?

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COVER STORY



PHOTO BY ROB CALA

Red Octopus

FITZGERALD

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he was a student. Now he's the teacher of that class, as well as introductory biology and AP environmental science. He joined the faculty in 2008.

"The class has that long history of getting kids out experiencing the coastal ecosystems and learning how to do marine research," he said. "It's nice to be able to take advantage of that as a classroom, a place for students to learn about the ocean and the animals that live there."

Unfortunately, the school lacked the funding to purchase equipment the students needed to collect data. That's where the Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve came to the rescue. The non-profit organization raised \$5,000 to purchase digital probe ware, sensors and probes in a hand-held computer. It's very high tech and has been put to use two ways, both in

the field and in class, Centoni said.

"They are collecting data about temperature, dissolved oxygen levels, pH and salinity. They are using it to get a profile of what the water quality is during a field trip. In class we do manipulative labs, where we are doing experiments. It allows us to get information that you couldn't do simply and easily. It opens up the ability to ask questions about the ecosystem structure that you couldn't do informally walking along the reef," he said.

Because of the experience in class, some students have told Centoni they want to pursue marine biology.

"This is a cool experience for them. They get a taste of what it's like to be in that field. Hopefully, we will get some motivated people studying the ocean. The course has a long history of inspiring marine biologists and getting people interested in studying the ocean, including me," he said.

The class goes on field trips once every two weeks. Each time they study a dif-

ferent topic, such as water quality, biodiversity, or bacteria in the harbor, to name a few. In labs, the students learn how to find out fundamental information about marine ecosystems.

"The equipment gave us the chance to do something the way scientists do it," he said.

The class meets five days a week and works into its curriculum teaching younger students about the intertidal environment. Elementary school students as well as the introductory biology students go out on tours with the class.

Centoni said he continues to be inspired by his students. They always bring up articles they read about research being done and new species being discovered. Recently, they shared information they learned about bad news at Fitzgerald, the dying of the sea stars.

"They are curious and worried about the sea stars dying. It's a terrible thing, but it's nice to see students interested," Centoni said.

The sea stars have not been seen for months, said



PHOTO BY JOSEPH CENTONI

Former Half Moon Bay High School student Rhiana Shafer collecting temperature data with digital probeware donated by Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

Fitzgerald ranger Rob Cala.

"Sea stars are dying from Vancouver all the way south. The first one to go was a sunflower star. I have not seen one in six months. We don't know what's causing it. We're hoping it does not impact the rest of the species," he said.

Friends of Fitzgerald volunteer coordinator Linda Ciotto provides continuing education to docents on topics of interest. She learned about the sea stars dying.

"It's very sad and upsetting. Scientists think they have solved it, but won't publish results for a while. This

is a species wipe out. It could take decades for any recovery," she said.

Despite the sad disappearance of the sea stars, there's plenty to see in the tide pools at low tide. The best time of year to visit is January through June because the tides are best.

Cala, a county park ranger for the last two years, has an infectious enthusiasm about sharing Fitzgerald with visitors of all ages.

"The kids genuinely get excited, whatever they see. They really feel empowered. We draw kids from the outer boundaries of the Bay Area

who can't get this experience any other way. We on the Coastsides tend to take it for granted, but this is so new to the kids from San Jose," he said.

On a recent walk with this reporter, he pointed out fighting anemone tentacles, deep purple urchins and hermit crabs. Iridaea algae, colorful as a rainbow, glowed and shimmered in the tide pool. Radula (tongue) marks were scratched on a chiton home scar, the place this mollusk calls home. A leather star

See **FITZGERALD**, Page 7

COVER STORY

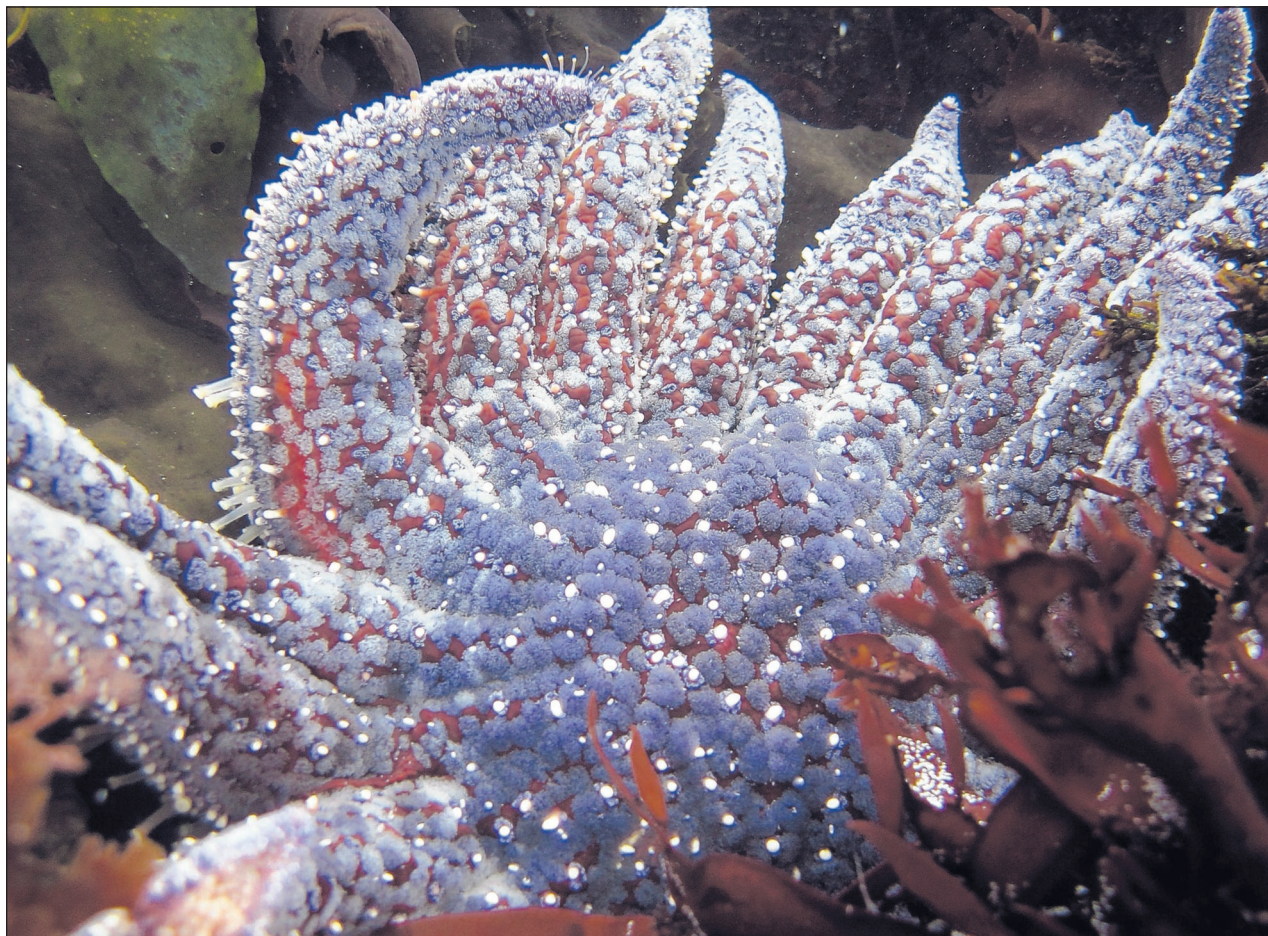


PHOTO BY ROB CALA

Sunflower Star, currently experiencing a mysterious die off up and down the West Coast

FITZGERALD

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was busily growing back its missing leg. Mussel beds and barnacles, cup coral, turban snails and limpit, and sunburst and green anemones were all living out their lives in the tide pools. Turban snail homes in turn became homes for hermit crabs. The gumboot chiton is the biggest chiton in the world and it's in Fitzgerald.

About 350 harbor seals are at Fitzgerald year round. This time of year they congregate to mate and wean on the beach. The rangers set up spotting scopes so visitors can appreciate the seals in their natural habitat.

"They choose to be here and everyone gets a chance

to see them up close," Cala said. "They are protected by the Marine Mammal Act, so we educate on not approaching. It is a true wildlife refuge."

The Marine Mammal Center assists if a seal is in trouble.

Cala said a group of tenth graders a couple weeks ago saw an octopus, bat stars, leather stars, rays and purple urchins. Colorful sea anemones were feasting on anything they could get their tentacles on, with an especially big appetite for crab. The nudibranchs (sea slugs) are also very popular to see because of their brilliant colors.

"Everything eats everything in the tide pool. It's anything but a stationary place. Everyone leaves excited because they saw a variety of anemones and octopuses and urchins and the reef itself has colorful algae.

We have a lot of contrast. It's a beautiful place," Cala said.

Fitzgerald has been both a park and a reserve for the last 40 years. Twenty five species of plants and animals new to science at the time were discovered there, the earliest in 1909, said Friends member Ciotti. For the last several years, it has also been a protected marine sanctuary three miles across and three miles out. The San Mateo County Park rangers manage and protect the natural resources of Fitzgerald.

"We all try and make sure people understand how fragile the environmental ecosystem is here. Don't step into the tide pools and take things. Some days when we have 1,000 people here, it's hard to manage that. This is a place for education. It's really about quiet observation," said Cala.

Former ranger Bob

Breen, legendary for his work protecting the park and explaining its science, passed away last year. Cala, who is also a photographer and documentary filmmaker, dedicated a video he made about Fitzgerald to Breen. That video, "Fitzgerald Marine Reserve," will be shown at the San Francisco Ocean Film Festival March 8 with encore showings because of its educational nature.

John Steinbeck's writings about tide pools originally inspired Cala to become a ranger at Fitzgerald.

"We have all this drama and dynamic life happening in this ocean and we have this incredible tide pool," he said. "There is nothing routine here."

Retired Skyline College geology professor Mel Zucker explained what makes Fitzgerald a geologically interesting area.

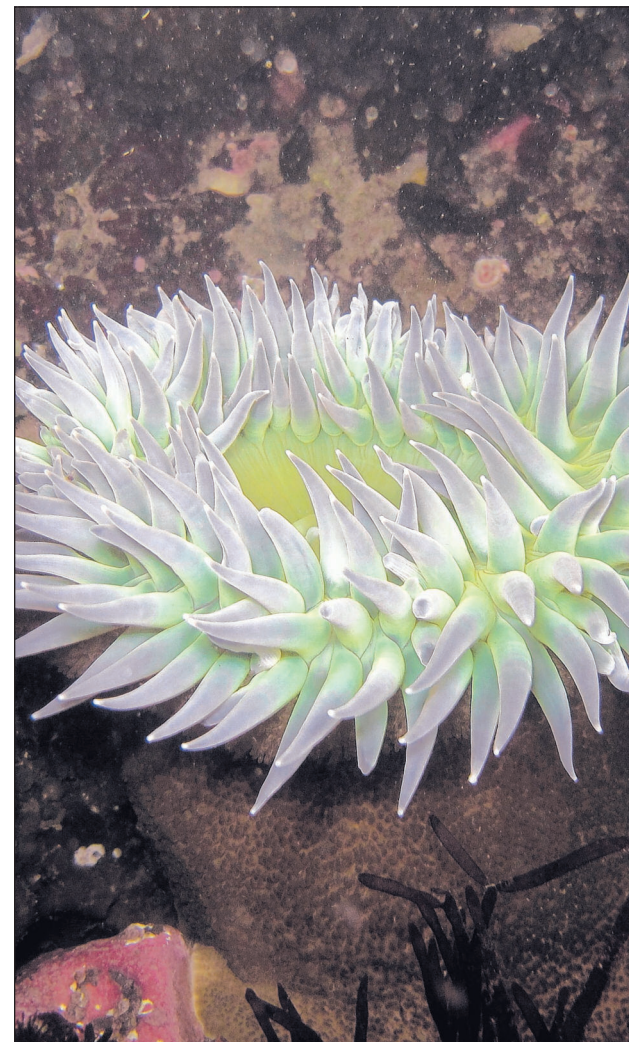


PHOTO BY ROB CALA

Green Anemone

"The cliffs of the reserve have been sliding and uplifted during a long history of activity along the San Gregorio fault system. The Seal Cove fault belongs to the region's family of fractures that make up the plate boundary in which we live. But the burden of concern for seismic safety comes with the gift of older (three to four million year old) hard rocks now sitting very close to sea level. So as the waves pound the cliffs to the concern of property owners who need protective armoring for their homes, a hard rocky shoreline is exposed on which the attached marine plants and animals can thrive in the reserve's tide pools and surge channels while the harbor seal colony watches from their balcony ledges," he wrote in an email.

The rangers and the Friends of Fitzgerald work with other organizations on research projects. Cal Academy of Sciences manages the Citizen Naturalist program and a nudibranch count. The Friends volunteer to help the Gulf of the Farallones update their field guides and work on the LiMPETS program, which stands for "long term monitoring program and experiential training for students."

This summer, the Friends are excited to present a Junior Ranger Program for one week in August, bringing it back from the program Breen started in the mid 1970s. The Friends also sponsor family fun days with various themes.

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COVER STORY



PHOTO BY ROB CALA

Monkey Face Eel

FITZGERALD

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The Friends volunteer many hours to lead tour groups and to train other volunteer naturalists. More than 5,000 students from third grade on up take a tour with a volunteer docent every year with 10-15 tours a month.

The Friends and the Fitzgerald board of directors fundraise for scholarships for graduating Half Moon Bay High School students and for special projects, such as the high school's scientific equipment. The scholarships, always granted in the name of Bob Breen, have been steadily increasing in number and amount.

Linda and Tom Ciotti have been volunteer docents for the last 11 years. Tom is president of the board and Linda the volunteer coordinator. They became involved with Fitzgerald because they live near it and often hiked to it. Linda manages

the class where docents are trained. It's intensive marine biology training with various instructors lasting 10 Saturdays.

"Once we learned so much about marine life; it was all so amazing. You get bitten by a bug. Those of us who have that passion about educating visitors, we are so excited to be down there," she said.

Often when leading a tour group, parents tell her they first visited the reserve when they were children. It's an experience that's being passed down from generation to generation.

"If the students have already been studying the marine life, they want to learn what's out there. It's nice to show them the biodiversity. Almost every tour, we hear, 'wow, this was the best field trip ever.' That's really gratifying," she said.

Ranger Cala said visiting Fitzgerald can be a transformative experience.

"I believe it causes good citizenship, sets a tone for curiosity, respect and stewardship of the natural world. It really is transfor-

mative. And in a tech heavy world it's good to breathe nature, and it gives kids and adults a chance to connect with marine wild life in a way that they don't forget."

If you go:

The 2014 San Francisco International Ocean Film Festival will show "Fitzgerald Marine Reserve" by Ranger Rob Cala Saturday, March 8, at 4 p.m. All films in the festival screen in the Bay Theater on Pier 39 adjacent to the Aquarium of the Bay. Check www.ocean-filmfest.org for the whole schedule and additional screenings.

Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is located in Moss Beach. Check the website, www.fitzgeraldreserve.org, for more information. Also go to San Mateo County Parks website at parks.smcgov.org for the latest news and information about all the county parks, including Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

Jane Northrop can be reached at jnorthrop@bayarea-newsgroup.com

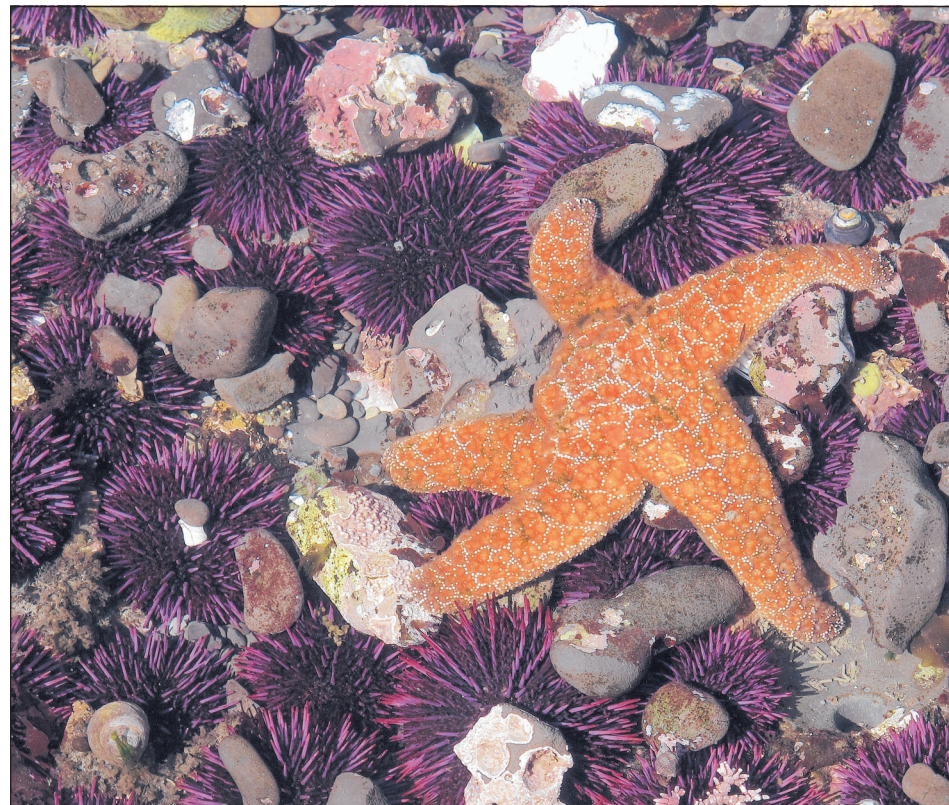


PHOTO BY ROB CALA

Ochre star and purple urchins



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