

New programming aids in fulfilling center's mission

BY MELANIE BOLTHOUSE
Summer Guide editor

After receiving orders to "haul away," sisters Sara and Stephanie Poelstra set about the task of raising the foresail aboard the Inland Seas Schoolship.

And with the ship under way, its true purpose took the helm.

With its seven different education stations, the Inland Seas offers onboard participants the chance to become scientists for a day, fulfilling the Inland Seas Education Association's mission for its programs.

Raising the sail was just one of many chores assigned to a group of 11 sailors on a recent morning family sail. "For every 25 to 40 kids that we take out, if we could turn one kid on to science and that kid goes on and, let's say, five years down the road or 10 years down the road he figures out a solution to this zebra mussel problem, then we'll think we hit the ball right over the fence," said Craig Holmes, ISEA Board of Directors president and volunteer on the Inland Seas.

Data collected during schoolship outings is recorded and sent to the DNR Fisheries Division in Lansing, making each sail more than just an average science fieldtrip for its students.

"They are out collecting these samples with the idea they will be provided to someone else for interpretation," Holmes said.

More than 55,000 students have gone through Inland Seas' programs since its start in 1989. And with a newly renovated building, the future of ISEA involves many more students.

"We're able to offer year-round programming and that's the biggest advantage," said Kim Biocchi, assistant director.

Each year, the center is able to accommodate 5,000 students who attend programs on the schoolship April through October. With year-round onshore and off-shore programming, however, more students can attend ISEA classes in all seasons, Biocchi said.

ISEA acquired its new building in December 2002 and moved in before November 2003. The facility includes office space for professional staff, an invasive species area with touch tanks and aquariums, a classroom and laboratory, and a working boat shop for the center's boat-building programs.

The pilot program took place in the spring of 2004 for students from Traverse City Area Public Schools' alternative high school.

"Everybody was really

excited about it and we continue to be excited for next year's programming," Biocchi said.

Sally Somsel, lead instructor on the schoolship, said the TCAPS students were very enthusiastic about the program. The group conducted stream flow work as well as researched the makeup of the shoreline.

Somsel feels the addition of onshore learning will greatly add to the schoolship's programs.

"We can bring the things that are in the water on land and show that we are all part of the same watershed in the Great Lakes," she said.

While the onshore/off-shore program is still a work in progress, ISEA hopes to have regular offerings by next summer to accompany its existing on-ship activities.

For more information on ISEA programs, visit www.greatlakeseducation.org or call 271-3077.



Record-Eagle/Melanie Bolthouse

Lexie and Joey McClelland of Milford, Mich. identify seaweed with their instructor Pat Holmes during a family sail on the Inland Seas schoolship. On-ship programs are used to educate students about the Great Lakes.



Record-Eagle/Melanie Bolthouse

Glenn Wolff painted the mural in the invasive species area of the new Inland Seas educational building.

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