

Alaska SeaLife Center
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I work at the Alaska SeaLife Center which is located in Seward Alaska. I work in the Education Department as an educator and I manage the Interpreter Department. The Alaska SeaLife Center is visited by about 30,000 youth age 4-17, and 5,000 toddler ages 0-4 every year, we are a nonprofit research aquarium able to reach out to youth of all nationalities and disabilities.

A fellow educator e-mailed me a link for a grant opportunity for a project I had mentioned to her early about plankton. After I went to your web site and read the grant description I was excited to write my proposal. My plan was to use the GEMS grant in two capacities: education and interpretation. In the summer, the Education Department offers hands-on education labs daily. One class that is not fully developed yet is a plankton lab; part of my grant application would go to supplies so the participants can collect plankton and examine their collection under a microscope. The next part of the grant would go to develop a new plankton exhibit at our Discover Touch Tank. The concept of the exhibit was to consist of two dissecting microscopes, identification sheets, an aquarium to house the plankton and a documenting camera hooked up to a monitor to show an enlarged view of the plankton. We have three sources for plankton: the plankton collected in the discovery lab, a raw water line at the Center that runs through a plankton net and plankton collected from two vertical 10 min boat tows. At the Discovery Touch Tank there will also be an interpreter stationed at the plankton exhibit to help educate guests on microscope use and on plankton.

The plan was to have the plankton exhibit set up by May 1, 2011 as this is when visitor numbers increase. The discovery labs begin May 31 and run through August 31, so I also wanted the plankton lab set up to be done by May 1st.

Six months later and my project has changed and morphed beyond my expectations. Originally I planned on just placing the tank and equipment on the Touch Tank counter with most of the information coming from the interpreters stationed at the Touch Tank. I had discussed my plans with the Aquarium Department and the Exhibits Department and received a lot of support and suggestions. First the Aquarium Department donated a commercial grade plankton net to this project, the Education Department donated a compound microscope and a dissecting microscope and the Exhibits Department committed to designing a tank cover and display for the plankton tank. My sponsor at C-MORE Dr. Michelle Hsia was a great help with supplies. I was trying to find a tank that was suitable for displaying plankton and keeping them alive, Michelle e-mailed my concerns to Norton Chan at the Waikiki Aquarium, who recommended a Kreisel tank. With the donation of the plankton net from the Aquarium Department and the microscopes from the Education Department I was able to buy a larger and well constructed Kreisel tank from Midwater Systems for a great price. After the equipment arrived the Aquarium Department has donated their time to install the tank, at this moment we are waiting on a pump to arrive before the installation is complete. Tomorrow we are vetting the final text and lay out of the exhibit display. In addition to the Exhibits Department making a plankton display one of the Aquarium Department interns has designed a slide show and

plankton ID cards for her intern project. She has spent hours taking pictures of live and static plankton for this project.

This project has been very eye opening for me. It has encouraged me to apply for more grants and appreciate all the support from my co-workers. I developed a great fascination with plankton when I work for Kenai Fjord Tours as a science instructor for their Marine Science for Students Program. My favorite activity to teach was the plankton tow. This grant has allowed me to bring this enjoyment for plankton here to the Alaska SeaLife Center. My project is about educating students and the general public about plankton. Most visitors to the Alaska SeaLife Center do not understand how fundamental plankton is to the food web and our Earth. I would like students and visitors to walk away from the plankton lab and exhibit amazed at the life they saw in a drop of water. Not only will the participants learn about plankton but also microscopes and science, this fun interaction will help inspire interest in Microbial Oceanography and science in general. Thank you for enabling this project and helping me achieve this goal.