

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

WONDER ON WHEELS

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Of the many wonderful things about the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History is the idea that it... sticks around. I don't mean the history that dates back to 1883 (though that's a remarkable record of constant community significance). No, I'm talking about the fact that the exhibits and artifacts and educational aims of the museum are primarily focused on the local and regional.

There's a Main Gallery that features everything from dioramas of coastal tide pools to taxidermy displays of local wildlife. There's a Bird Gallery about Central Coast species... and an interactive and multimedia Monarch Exhibit. There are exhibits about often overlooked residents of the region in its history - the Rumsen Ohlone tribe (a showcase of rare and historic baskets) and the Chinese fishermen (a history of the Point Alones fishing village through a dioramic reconstruction and video clips). And behind the scenes, the museum has massive collections of photos and fossils and flora that tell the tale of the cultural and creature history of the area.

So given all that, it is perhaps ironic that the museum has hit the road, in a manner of speaking. A year ago this month, the museum launched - or actually started the ignition on - Wonder on Wheels (WOW), a mobile museum tailored to K-5th grade students. The 22-foot, fully-electric decked-out van (inside and out) is designed as an interactive learning experience that can drive right up to schools, libraries, community centers, farmers' markets, even private events (you can secure a date by emailing education@pgmuseum.org). It takes about an hour to set up the presentation once the van arrives, about 30 minutes to takedown. And then the van is off to its next destination in Monterey County.

The heart of WOW comes in the form of three themed interactive carts: "Pollinators and Flowers" allows participants to, for example, "Match the Pollinators" and learn how different flower colors and shapes attract various birds, bees, and beetles. "Monterey Bay Wildlife" includes "Spot the Adaptations," utilizing animal puppets asking kids to identify characteristics



that enhance its survival chances. And “People + Our Land” includes a search-through-the-cart scavenger hunt in which participants learn how various materials were used by the people of Monterey Bay. In addition, kids can build their own museum using interactive panels.

To some extent, the Wonder on Wheels serves as a sort of adjunct to the Museum of Natural History in the sense that it allows a little more space for making use of its artifacts. Perhaps the most eye-opening piece of information is the fact that, at any one time, the museum displays barely three percent of the 70,000 or so objects housed therein. The WOW project allows an introduction of more objects and, more importantly, the educational insight associated with them.

But the thing I appreciate most about the moving van (so to speak) is how it allows a notion birthed in Pacific Grove – a mission to inspire discovery, wonder and stewardship of the natural world – to benefit communities big and small throughout the county. Over the past year, for instance, the van has visited everywhere from the Marina Library to the Salinas Public Library to the Greenfield Community Science Workshop. Many of the students who interact with the van may not make it out to the Monterey Peninsula in their lives, let alone visit the museum. So the museum brings its programs to them.

The hope, of course, is that participating kids will react by saying the name of the vehicle: Wow.