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OIMB takes contest kids to sea

By [Jo Rafferty](#), Staff Writer

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CHARLESTON — The research vessel Pluteus, a 42-foot trawler owned by the Oregon Institute of Marine Biology in Charleston, crossed the bar, flanked by the north and south jetties, into the Pacific Ocean, just outside Coos Bay.

It was sunny with a light breeze that became increasingly cooler, a perfect morning for seven of the eight children who won the chance to participate in the mini-research cruise as part of OIMB's logo contest.



Caitlin Happeny, 12, is poked by a crab Saturday aboard the Research Vessel Pluteus. - World Photo by Alex Powers

Pluteus Capt. Larry Draper started the mechanical winch turning as University of Oregon professor Alan Shanks and GK12 Marine Education Project Coordinator Trish Mace hoisted a net on the deck.

"OK, let's see what we got," Shanks said, as he dumped a moon jelly, a Dungeness crab, other assorted flat and bottom fish, shrimp and a sea star from Charleston Bay into a tray.

Mud and rocks dripped, followed by shells and seaweed as the children, in grades kindergarten through sixth, crouched down on their knees to inspect the treasures.

The 5-inch, pancake-shaped clear jellyfish proved popular, as the children passed it from hand to hand.

"It's slimy more than cold," said 11-year-old Briana Bittner, of Bandon, a Harbor Lights Middle School fifth-grader.

She scrunched her nose as she ran her finger across it in the palm of her hand.

Caitlin Happeny, a sixth-grader from Blanco Elementary School in Langlois, carried the jelly in one hand, and a handful of crackers in the other.

All the children helped themselves to crackers — not the jellies — in case their stomachs couldn't take the ocean swells. Luckily, the water remained fairly calm and so did their tummies.

"Today it's lovely," Shanks said. "But if it was blowing 20 to 30 (mph) like the other day; it gets nasty out there."

Students from schools in Coos Bay, North Bend, Bandon, Langlois and Port Orford entered the contest, sponsored by OIMB and the Natural Science Foundation GK12 Program.

Children from each grade won for their logo submissions, which are being posted on the OIMB Web site, <http://uoregon.edu/-oimb/>, displayed on posters and clothing. All the children were present, except the grand-prize winner, Alanna Smith, a Harbor Lights fifth-grader, who was attending a wedding. (See sidebar for list of winners.)

Most of the children had been boating on a lake or a river, but not on the bay or the ocean. Each of them came with a parent, except Tristan Jones, 9, a fourth-grader at Hillcrest Elementary School, in Coos Bay, who chose to take her grandfather.

"She was tickled to take me," Richard Stedman said. "She's been jazzed about it all week."

Before the cruise, everyone donned lifejackets as Draper explained what to do in an emergency.

"If somebody were to fall in the water, grab a life ring," Draper said, adding, "Try not to bean somebody in the head with it."

Draper served 22 years with the U.S. Coast Guard before becoming a full-time captain for OIMB 12 years ago.

OIMB purchased the 38-year-old vessel four years ago, Mace said. It owns three other boats, including a 20-foot Wooldridge, an ocean vessel; and two 16-foot boats, a flat bottom and an inflatable, used in rivers and lakes. Students attending OIMB, working on their bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees, use the boats year-round on research cruises, searching for marine animals such as basket starfish, which can only be found about five or six miles out in the ocean.

"They're spectacular," Shanks said. "They're really weird-looking creatures."

OIMB graduate students, who were the children's teachers, weren't on the boat ride on Saturday because they are on a research cruise of their own in the Bahamas. They're reporting their progress back to the children's classrooms via a Web link, according to Mace.

The youngest winner, Yoselin Aguirre, 6, a Madison Elementary School kindergartner, glanced around and held her father Angel Aguirre's hand as the boat's engine started up.

The engine reduced to a purr as the winch released the cable into the water.

A young harbor seal barked at the children as it swam by. Shanks said it was probably an orphan.

The winch brought up several more loads of sea creatures throughout the morning.

Nine-year-old Kameron Gandy, a third-grader at North Bay Elementary School, said he learned from his teacher how a sea star eats.

"They stick their stomach out," he said.

Mace explained that the stomach is inserted into a shell where it digests the organism.

"So, it literally does go out to lunch," she said.

Parents were given the responsibility of pulling up a few of the nets. Children screamed as two crab pots holding several of the shellfish were dumped onto the deck.

Caitlin, with a crab in each hand, discovered what their claws can do.

"I got pinched right on the thumb," she said. "It hurts."

"She's not scared of anything. That's what bothers me," said her mother, Pam Wood, as she watched her daughter kiss the crab on the "lips."

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