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## The magic of an 'Ocean Oasis' (4/22)

By Whitney Youngs

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A widescreen IMAX film of marine life under and around Mexico's Sea of Cortez and desert life along California's Baja peninsula will make its way into Hermosa Beach this Saturday thanks to the Sister City Association which will be showing "Ocean Oasis" in conjunction with the San Diego Natural History Museum.

As a way to raise funds for the local nonprofit organization, members of the Sister City Association are hosting showings of the film with the last one being at 6 p.m. at the Hermosa Beach Community Center on Pier Avenue. The film's last showing will follow a cocktail hour at 5 p.m. and will precede a fiesta buffet dinner. The cost for dinner, drinks and the showing is \$25. The proceeds of each showing will go toward environmental education programs in the South Bay and in Hermosa's sister city, Loreto, which coincidentally is located along the Sea of Cortez.

"Our most notable program is the education of school teachers in Loreto," said Sister City Association President Dick McCurdy. "We have been doing it since 1997 and the idea is education of the preservation of the Sea of Cortez which is the most valuable marine laboratory on this planet. More than 4,000 marine species have been identified so it provides tremendous information for marine biologists just unto itself. It also sustains the life of the Mexican people, particularly in Baja and the coastal regions. It's a fabulous body of water."

In 1997, Jack Belasco, former Hermosa Beach mayor and Sister City Association member, tried to figure out a way to promote the preservation through the Sea of Cortez via the association's ties with Loreto. Over the Internet, Belasco discovered the efforts of the San Diego Natural History Museum and the association then joined PROBEA, which is the Spanish acronym for Proyecto Bio-regional de Educaci—n Ambiental, which translates to English as Bio-regional Environmental Education Project. PROBEA is a collaboration of 10 organizations - five of them from the U.S. and the remaining from Mexico. The effort promotes environmental education through its ties between U.S. and Mexican cities.

Belasco is also one of the founders of the association and personally underwrote the association's paramedic training program, which is the only one of its kind in Baja.

Representatives from the San Diego Natural History Museum, along with teachers and community members of Loreto, initiated a program last month in which more than 100 students from Loreto and other surrounding cities watched "Ocean Oasis." The viewing coincided with a re-enacted expedition that famed author John Steinbeck and Edward Ricketts embarked on in 1940 when they explored the Sea of Cortez. A group of scientists traced the steps of the journey that Steinbeck and Ricketts wrote about in the book "The Log from the Sea of Cortez."

Jon Christensen, who is a writer and Steinbeck Fellow at San Jose State University, traveled with the expedition and posted daily logs of the trip online. Twenty-five students from Loreto joined the expedition during its stop in the ocean just off the coast of the village and had the opportunity to participate in the research day.

Loreto is a town more than 300 years old about 1,000 miles south of San Diego. It's best described as a small fishing village and the site of the first Spanish mission. The Hermosa Beach Sister City Association forged its cultural ties with Loreto about 37 years ago.

The "Ocean Oasis" filmmakers, a group of eight men, set out to create a stunning visual journey of life inside two very divergent natural worlds - the sea and desert - capturing footage in remote locales, some of which were only accessible via helicopter or boat.

"The film is stunning; it's an absolutely amazing piece of cinematography," said Sister City Association board member Rick Koenig. "Anybody who misses it will be hearing about it from their friends and neighbors."

The film's shooting footage includes 320,000 feet of film (nearly 60 miles and each 1,000-foot load spanning only three minutes) that was pieced together with recordings from the field, voice-over narration by researchers and an original music score performed by the Prague Symphony Orchestra.

"'Ocean Oasis' is a stunning film about the magic of Baja California, Mexico and the Gulf of California - one of the most nutrient-rich seas in the world," said Carol Radford, who works in the education department of the San Diego Natural History Museum. "Most human activities

affect local ecosystems and the consequences of these activities can be far-reaching. This film provides an opportunity for students to discuss conservation and the human impact on natural resources regardless of locale."

Dr. Michael Hager, who is the executive director at the San Diego Natural History Museum, was one of the filmmakers on the project and led planning efforts in the early 1990s that included museum programs centered on Southern California and the Baja peninsula.

Soames Summerhays, who served as the film's director and producer, was born and educated in the United Kingdom. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology and specialized in marine biology in his postgraduate studies. Over the past 10 years, Summerhays has led more than 100 expeditions to some of the most remote parts of the world. Summerhays' filmmaking career began in 1979 with the production of "The Great Barrier Reef" and he founded Summerhays Films in 1985.

James Neihouse worked on the film as its director of photography; and has worked on numerous feature films, commercials, documentaries and music videos. Neihouse is currently working on "Bears," "The Jane Goodall Story" and "Yosemite." Neihouse worked on the short documentary "The Eruption of Mount St. Helens," which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1980.

Bob Cranston, who first started diving with a camera at the age of 13, acted as the director of underwater photography. By the time he was 18, Cranston became a full-dive instructor with NAUI. He became an underwater cinematographer for films and commercials by the mid-1980s. Cranston has worked for the Discovery Channel, National Geographic television and ESPN.

Some footage of the film captures the behavior of migrating whales, the dancelike moves of mating terns and the fights between elephant seals. The film also features distinct geographical areas from snow-capped mountains to deserts to mangrove swamps.

Showings for "Ocean Oasis" are at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., and cost \$5. The evening fiesta event beginning at 5 p.m. with the showing commencing at 6 p.m. is \$25. Since the Sister City Association is a nonprofit entity, all tickets are tax-deductible. The association will also be selling raffle tickets for prizes.

