

Mid-Atlantic Marine Education Association Award Winners



2017

Category: Informal Educator Award

Rachel Riesbeck Clark receives MAMEA's 2017 Informal Educator Award

Rachel has been a powerhouse of creativity and energy in marine education since her arrival at the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center in 2008. As School Programs Specialist, she creates hands-on and inquiry activity stations. Students don't just hear about ocean acidification in a power point, they document the loss of calcium carbonate by weighing seashells before and after a soak in vinegar (a weak acid) that decreases their mass. Students place ice on models of land vs. sea surface and measure changing water levels as the ice melts, clarifying how glacial melt contributes to sea level rise. Using marine life clue cards and preserved specimens of their eggs, students learn about life cycles and try to determine the relationships between adults and their early life stages. Students measure fish models and check fishing regulations to determine whether the fish are "keepers," leading to discussions of sustainable fisheries. This hands-on learning approach extends out to teachers' classrooms, as well, through the "Suitcase Science" program that Rachel has spearheaded at the Aquarium. Teachers who can't visit the Aquarium, or who want to extend learning in marine science, can borrow these complete lessons kits.



Rachel received her award from MAMEA President Christopher Petrone at the 2017 MAMEA Conference in Ocean City, Maryland.
Photo: C.Hopper Brill.

Enthusiastic about expanding her own learning, Rachel participates in workshops and on-line training, and networks with other professionals to expand her knowledge and pedagogy expertise. She also provides opportunities for her education staff to participate in enriching experiences. She arranged an ocean collection trip with another museum department, and after encouraging a colleague to apply for Teacher-At-Sea, accommodated her schedule so she could participate.

Rachel generates rewarding opportunities for local educators. She sponsors workshops on marine topics at the aquarium and partners with local environmental groups. When a local school system ended their support for teacher workshops recently, Rachel stepped up to offer them three highly experiential workshops. Teacher participants left each day enthusiastically planning how they could incorporate their experiences in the classroom. To assure that her school programs are meeting the needs of classroom educators, Rachel has an active Teacher Advisory Panel that meets 5 times a year and she seeks the Panel's input on programming, logistics, and unmet needs.

And, in her role as an active NOAA Climate Steward, Rachel has been making important contributions to awareness about this timely topic, disseminating current information to educators and the public. She has been an active MAMEA member for many years, presenting at both MAMEA and NMEA conferences. She frequently networks with educators from other facilities, sharing ideas and brainstorming better ways to increase public and student interest in marine topics. She adapts best practices to create outstanding learning experiences related to important local and global marine topics. She is always willing to go above and beyond to make quality marine education a reality. Congratulations Rachel!