

Children research, build Victor Aquarium at Teton Valley Community School

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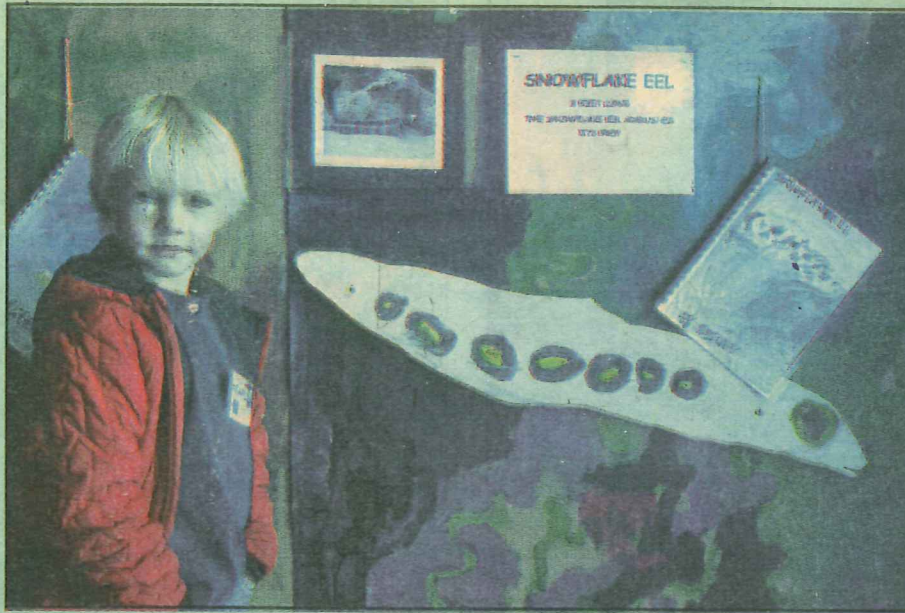
If you want to get to know some of the more exotic animals in the ocean, ask a kindergartener.

Twelve Teton Valley Community School youngsters researched, wrote about and helped build Victor's first life-sized aquarium. They celebrated its grand opening Dec. 19 with parents, teachers and friends.

You won't find real water here, but the youngsters' depictions, stories and research prove this is, otherwise, the real thing.

They've been working on the Victor Aquarium for about 2.5 months, said Tori Hederman, who team-teaches with Katie Cisco. The Aquarium is in a large garage on the TVCS campus.

"It started from their curiosity of non-fiction books, and our name is The Dolphins," said Hederman.



Declan White did Snowflake Eels as his research project for the Victor Aquarium.

Each child picked an animal and became experts on their critters, and wrote his or her own non-fiction books, complete with table of contents, which were hung beside each of the tanks.

"The project involved interviews with

marine biologists and virtual visits to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, measuring and drawing animals to scale, and designing the animal's ocean habitats," said a release from Cindy Riegel, administrative director at TVCS.

"We decided to make the measurements as our math unit," said Hederman, "and we made our life-sized animals, and from there we thought, let's build an aquarium in Victor, Idaho."

The project-based learning program was based on "How can we, as scientists, build an aquarium to teach people about ocean animals?"

There is a tide pool, containing starfish and other critters made of clay by the kids in art class. Walls are fish tanks, and everything is life sized except for a sperm whale and a giant squid, which are made to

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TVN Photos/Ken Levy

Above: Timmy Russell did his aquarium project on electric eels.

Left: Theresa Young researched and wrote about giant squids.

baby versions of those creatures.

Hederman and her husband, Peter Kelly, cut out all the animals, but from the youngsters' drawings. The children measured them and researched and wrote their books with the help of fifth- and sixth-grade students at the school, "and we used our big kids to be their hands, and then they did a lot of transcribing," said Hederman.

"They've done all the painting of their tanks to look like the habitat they would live in," she said.

TVCS recently joined up with Teton Science School.

"We're now under their umbrella of programs," said Hederman.

Theresa Young did her non-fiction book on giant squids.

"It's like 10 feet," she said, "and it's a baby. The grownup is 33 feet, maybe."

Timmy Russell did his research on electric eels.

"They're eight feet long and they lay 15,000 eggs at one time," he said.

Declan White worked on a snowflake eel.

"They eat meat, crabs and fish, and they're three feet. They ambush things. That means they hide in bushes and

they jump out," Declan said.

The youngsters "have become experts in ocean animals and aquarium design," said Hederman.

"Project-based learning is used at all grade levels at TVCS as a way to apply academic skills and knowledge to real world questions and problems," according to the release. "Projects are carefully planned by the TVCS faculty to incorporate specific learning goals and standards while also engaging the children in the learning process."

Contact the school at (208) 787-0445 for more information.

