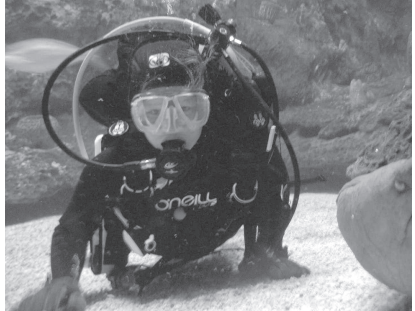


The University of Vermont – Letters from the recipients of the Kate Svitek Memorial Scholarships

Dear Svitek Family,

I am writing to thank you deeply for your contribution that has allowed me to complete a summer internship with the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher (NCAFF). This internship has not only helped me to gain academic knowledge and professional experience, but also to grow as a person and to direct my career path.

As an intern at NCAFF, I worked in the aquariology department and was also a member of the SCUBA dive team. The experiences that I had at NCAFF are incredibly valuable to me; opportunities that I considered rare privileges were actually daily responsibilities there! Some 'normal' duties included hand-feeding five enormous Southern stingrays by lifting their velvet-smooth noses and sliding pieces of squid into their mouths, cleaning and feeding six grunting juvenile alligators poised with their mouths open, ready to strike anything that came



within reach, and diving in tropical reef exhibits as small angelfish and filefish nibbled on my hair. I had the opportunity to dive in the 250,000 gallon Cape Fear Shoals tank on multiple occasions, which houses sharks, stingrays, Moray eels, and many species of bony fish. It is an altogether different feeling being on the inside of an exhibit- seeing children and parents waving from the other side of the glass and taking pictures as you are scrubbing algae and cleaning tank windows. As is wrestling two 7 foot long, 500 pound female alligators from their exhibit, carrying them through the aquarium as they are thrashing and clawing, positioning them for weighing, and pinning them for an ultrasound. I befriended a male wood duck named Wilson, who would step up onto my hand and sit on my shoulder. I traveled with the staff to a nearby coastal inlet to collect specimen for exhibit and study, and prepared 2 million-year-old Megalodon teeth, collected by our dive team, for exhibit. I cared for day-old seahorses and baby guitarfish, which is a species that is seldom born in captivity. And while these experiences along with many more made my summer unforgettable, simply the opportunity to be in the aquarium before visitors are admitted each day was a peaceful, personal, and unique privilege, that I will value for the rest of my life.

Academically, the knowledge and skills gained through my internship with the North Carolina Aquarium have provided me with experience in a field in which I previously had none. I feel that this internship has closed any gaps that I may have had in my education in wildlife and fisheries biology by giving me insight into the marine science field, of which I had limited academic exposure. This experience, which would have been impossible without the generosity of your family, has revealed an unknown desire in myself to further explore this field, to perhaps pursue a graduate degree in marine biology, and to discover mysteries of one of the few remaining wild and unknown ecosystems on earth.

Again, I would like to express my gratitude to you for your overwhelming generosity and for allowing me the opportunity to have the experiences I have had this summer during my internship with North Carolina Aquariums at Fort Fisher. Please know that your contribution has made a difference in my life. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Allison Prokop