

Features



Caitlin Pyle: From Cornfields To California

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*By Annabeth Miiler,
ShowMe Times Editor*

When Caitlin Pyle was growing up in Dexter, she probably never imagined that her studies and career path would lead her to Northern California and a marine mammal center. But lo and behold, that's exactly where the Dexter native is spending her summer.

Caitlin is interning at the Northcoast Marine Mammal Center in Crescent City, Calif. It's a long way from the corn and soybean fields of Stoddard County where she was raised.

Caitlin is the daughter of Darrell and Toni Pyle and is a 2006 graduate of Dexter High School. She graduated in 2010 from John Brown University in Siloam Springs, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a field emphasis.

Since graduating from college Caitlin has "tested the waters" so-to-speak through internships. She completed two internships in 2010 – at the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma, Wash. Now she is in Crescent City, working at the small marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation center. She began work there the second week in June, and her first night on the job brought a bit of excitement.

"During the 8 p.m. feed
(4th and final feed of the

[images/Blog Images/Local News/6.20.2011 sea lion.jpg](#)

day) we were told about an animal not too far from the center that looked weak and was on the beach,” Caitlin said. “A couple of the other workers went to assess it, and then determined that it needed to be brought in for care.”

The animal was an underweight, young Northern Elephant Seal with large gashes around his rear flippers.

“We loaded up the truck with a crate and other equipment needed for loading up the animal,” she said. “By using ‘herd boards’ we were able to coax it into the crate and carry it back to the truck. Once back at the center we weighed him (113 lbs.), gave him electrolytes by tubing him, and cleaned his wounds.”

The next day Caitlin and the staff were able to draw blood and check the seal for infections and diseases. But Caitlin said the seal was strong and a fast learner.

“After only a couple days he began eating fish on his own,” she reports. “It was an exciting end to a first day and gave me an early look at what this career would involve. It was great to quickly see how we help the animals in need.”

Caitlin reports the seal has been improving and will most likely be released soon.

“It is neat to be able to follow an animal through from rescue to release,” she commented.

images/Blog Images/Local News/6.20.2011 trio.jpg

The facility at Crescent City is a small marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation center covering the northern California coastline. And Caitlin reports that different times of the year bring in different species. They currently have Pacific Harbor Seal pups, young Northern Elephant Seals, and a California Sea Lion.

“During this three month internship I will assess stranded animals, assist with rescuing sick or injured animals, feed the animals (sometimes by tube-feeding), clean their pools and pens, assist with vet work by administering medications and treatments, and assist with releasing rehabilitated animals ready to return to the wild,” she said of the new internship.

While she is not certain of her career path, she says the internships have been a big help in helping her make those all-important career decisions.

“My internships have definitely helped guide me and confirm that this is the field I want to work in,” she commented. “I really enjoyed my zoo/aquarium internships, but so far I am liking the rescue and rehab aspect even more. The animals you work with change often, and you get new cases brought in to figure out so the routine is constantly changing.”

She said she changed career path plans during college – as most college students do (at least once!). She decided she wanted something a little more “hands on” – and she has always been fascinated with the oceans and the animals that live in the oceans.

“Obviously, Southeast Missouri does not provide much opportunity for work in the marine field,” she said. “I’ve had to search the country to follow my dreams, but look at the places it has taken me.”

Photos Above: Top Photo: Caitlin on the California coast. Middle Photo: Rasputin the California Sea Lion Bottom Photo: The Trio of friends - Caitlin, Kristen Bush and Heather Waddle. Kristen and Heather joined Caitlin on her cross-county journey to Crescent City, Calif.

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