

# The story of the DORY

## A 30-year-old grant is still giving back to the community

STORY AND PHOTOS: KIMBERLEY FEHR

**In 1978, high school science teacher** Rod MacVicar received a \$4,150 grant from Vancouver Foundation to buy a 25-foot aluminum dory. He christened it the Medusa 2 and used it to launch a marine education program for students.

“At the time, I was hoping to make a big difference in students’ lives,” says

MacVicar. “I think I almost ignored the small daily differences we can make. Over time I have begun to realize that these small differences can add up to big differences, which I did not foresee.”

Thirty years later, his program, the Marine Educational Services Association (MEDUSA), and the Medusa 2 are still

taking students out on the waters of Port Moody Inlet. Thousands of young people have reached over the edge of the boat to touch the ocean, seen harbour seals in their natural environment and learned how fragile the ocean can be. The Medusa 2 has fought fires, cleaned up oil spills, conducted research, restored



habitat and starred in countless documentary films – and it's still going strong.

"Boy, you name it, the boat's done it," says MacVicar. "It's always on the go. It's had an interesting life."

The boat and MacVicar have influenced many lives. MacVicar was a teacher at Centennial School for many years and was instrumental in designing the curriculum for Wildlife of B.C. 11 and Fish and Wildlife 12 high school courses. Many students he took out on the water have gone on to pursue further education in sciences. One former student is even doing her master's in science at UBC with a focus on plankton.

Another former student, Melanie Mattson, followed in MacVicar's footsteps, taking over those classes at Centennial School after he retired. When she was a student there, MacVicar got her involved in another one of his 30-year projects: the Mossom Creek Hatchery, which he started with his colleague Ruth Foster. While volunteering, Mattson took her first ride on the

Medusa 2 in 1988, transporting salmon fry from the hatchery to a sea pen on the water, where the fry can adapt to the ocean environment.

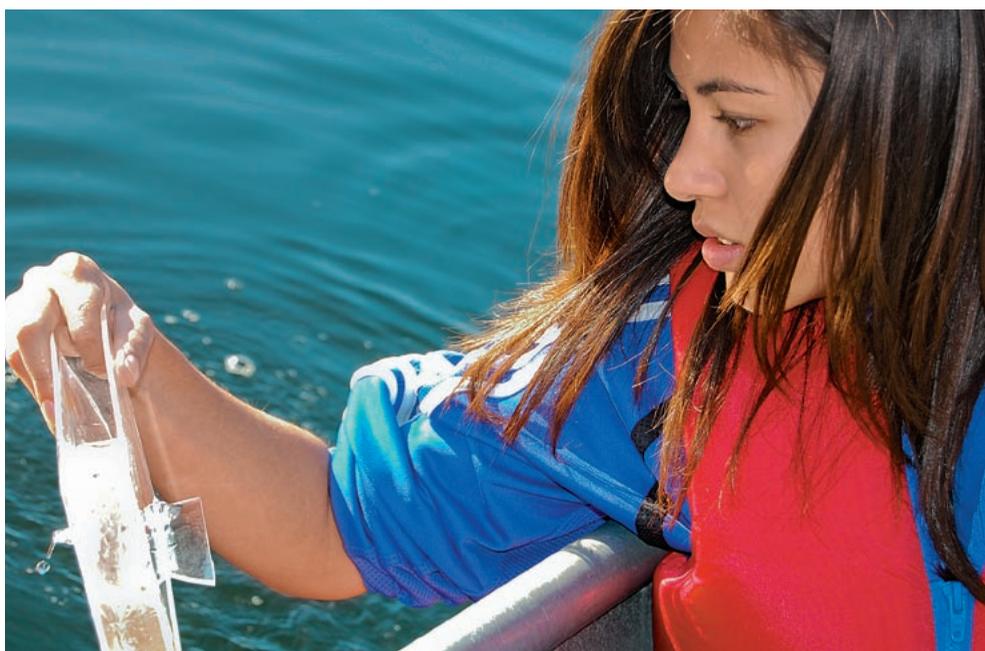
"I've never stopped going out on the boat. I'm still going on it and I have a life-long connection with the hatchery," says Mattson. "My students love going out on the water."

Today she brought her classes from Centennial to MacVicar's sea school. Armed with notepads and quiet fascination, the teenagers don orange life jackets for a turn on the Medusa 2. They reach over the boat to capture water and specimens with their plastic viewing chambers while MacVicar runs a tow in the water to catch live specimens in a bucket and distribute them to the students.

Like a magician, he plucks a sea-grape – a perfectly clear, crystalline creature – out of the muck in the bucket and places it in a student's hand like a treasure, just one of many mysteries students can discover on the water.

"It's difficult to care about the ocean if you don't know it has anything in it," he says. "If you think it's just crystal-clear water, then you don't mind dumping your sink, throwing waste into the ocean. Creating awareness of what's there is probably the first step in starting to care for it."

Boating is prohibitively expensive, he adds. "If it wasn't for the funding we had from Vancouver Foundation, we couldn't afford to do this. Charter boats cost thousands of dollars an hour, so it's not an option to take kids out on those. And they're not equipped for dragging nets and getting wet and dirty and putting life jackets on the kids, and having them get their hands in the water. This cuts the price down to a manageable level. That one investment 30 years ago has created a legacy that is still inspiring young people to participate, get involved, ask questions, learn more, do more and become more. It has paid itself back a thousand times to the community." **VF**



**Left: Students get ready for an educational exploration in Port Moody Inlet aboard the Medusa 2, an aluminum dory paid for 30 years ago by a grant to the Marine Educational Services Association (MEDUSA) from Vancouver Foundation.**

**Above: Kianna Leung examines a water sample as part of a program aboard the Medusa 2.**