

SPEAKER: 'OCEANS ARE IN TROUBLE AND IT'S CAUSED BY HUMANS'

# Saving the sea: Artists tackle ocean conservation

BY SANNE YOUNG  
THE COAST STAR

For centuries, the ocean has inspired artists up and down the Jersey Shore to create seascapes and other beautiful maritime-themed works that fill local art shops and adorn the walls of homes.

But today that source of inspiration is in serious trouble, according to Suzanne Crosby, who this year founded the Art for Sea nonprofit that uses art to support ocean conservation.

"I started thinking about myself in retirement, what I wanted to do with my artwork. I had so much stuff sitting around and I realized the ocean and environment is my passion ... Why not just dedicate whatever I do artistically to helping the ocean?"

"And then I thought about the friends I've made in the art community, and why wouldn't they want to jump on this bandwagon? ... So I started reaching out and people were very receptive."

Art for Sea currently has an exhibit of art for sale at the Brielle Public Library, 610 South St., July through September; and an artists reception with guest speaker Claire Ng was held at the library on Wednesday evening, July 22.

At the gathering, Ms. Ng described how plastic pollution, overfishing and climate change are rapidly damaging oceans all over the globe, and she revealed specific ways it is harming life, both marine and human, along the Jersey Shore.

"I have been involved in ocean sciences and the coast for as long as I can remember. I can remember my parents bringing me to the beach when I was a little girl," said Ms. Ng, who holds several postgraduate degrees.

"I went on to do my research at Rutgers on striped bass. It was something I was passionate about. ... My project was going on boats and doing a lot of fishing and figuring out how to protect the marine life that was there."

Ms. Ng currently teaches marine biology, environmental science and sustainable societies at the Marine Academy of Science and Technology [MAST] at Sandy Hook, a Monmouth County career high school.

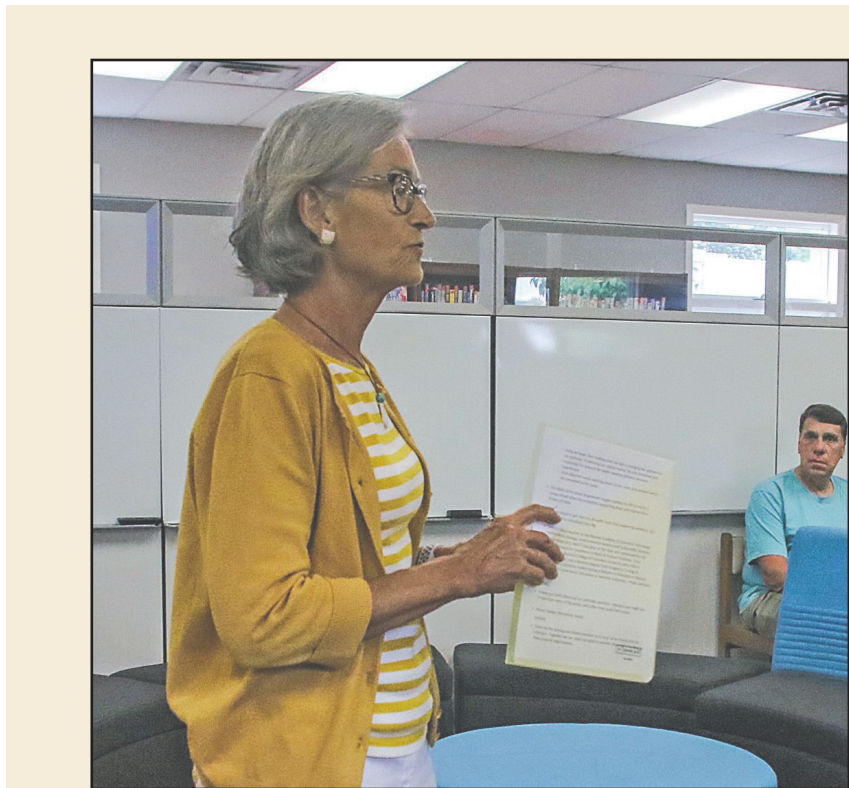
"The ocean is so beautiful. ... Students are excited about the ocean and they care and they want to see what's out there."

## PASSIONATE ABOUT THE OCEAN

"This year we were reaching for horseshoe crabs and fishing for squid and we were going into the river and on the boats and holding sharks ... They're learning about the ocean and they're getting passionate about it.

"But then there is also the dark side beneath the surface that they have to be aware of. The oceans are in trouble and it's caused by humans ... and we're getting [students] to be aware that we have done a lot of damage to this planet and we really need to step it up and think about what we can do as a solution to fix this.

"When you think of the carbon cycle ... what we're doing to the planet is we're taking this resource that has been buried in the ground for millions and millions of years, fossil fuels ... just digging it out and burning it in enormous quantities," she said.



Suzanne Crosby, founder of Art for Sea, speaks about the nonprofit's efforts to use art to support ocean conservation.



Claire Ng, marine biology teacher at the Marine Academy of Science and Technology, speaks about ocean conservation at the Brielle Public Library.



An audience listens to the guest speaker during an artists' reception July 24 at the Brielle Public Library, which is hosting an exhibit by Art for Sea.

That heat and carbon dioxide end up in the ocean, resulting in warmer water, less oxygen and high acidity, she said, "which is not a condition that any animal in the ocean wants, so we are setting up for a lot of disaster coming down the line."

These problems include sea level rise, coral bleaching, toxic algae blooms, habitat loss, ocean acidification and fishery destruction; she noted that melting ice caps mean polar bears can't survive much longer.

**COASTAL FLOODING, OVERFISHING**  
"That seems far from New Jersey," she said, but a recent study revealed "that of all the 50 states in America, the state that will be affected most, in terms of density, by sea level rise, is New Jersey. We New Jerseyans are going to be impacted most - more than Louisiana, more than Florida, more than California. It's us."

She said scientists predict that in about a dozen years, non-storm coastal flooding will become more regular and widespread locally.

"That means you won't be able to get down [Route] 35, 18's going to be flooded, Ocean Avenue, all of these roads you are starting to see flooded at high tide, when it rains."

Ms. Ng said another problem is overconsumption of seafood.

"I love my fish ... and most of the fish you are probably familiar with - tuna, mahi mahi, swordfish, salmon - they're all top predators, which is the equivalent of, on a food web, eating all the lions ... and that's causing a lot of destruction down the food web, because you don't want to eat minnows or killifish.

"What happens as a result of our overfishing is we are ruining the top of the food web, which leaves a lot of something like jellyfish. So if you are wondering why, in the last few years, every summer we're seeing lots of jellyfish washing up on our beaches, well, who eats jellyfish?"

"So now you are having these problems because we are ... only hungry for certain things."

## PLASTIC POLLUTION

Plastics that pollute the ocean end up entangling or being ingested by marine animals, Ms. Ng said, and she noted that albatrosses live on tiny islands thousands of miles out in the ocean, away from humans.

"Scientists were stunned that when they do necropsies on them, [the birds] are filled with lots of plastics," that had

drifted from California and coastal cities.

She noted that plastic bags, flouting in the water, mimic jellyfish, which are a main food source of many sea turtles.

Ms. Ng said cigarette filters are the number one plastic waste that ends up in oceans, and another item on the top 10 list is plastic water bottles, "because we've been mass indoctrinated that tap water, even though it is clean, we can't drink that.

"The top 10 plastic items that are found in the ocean are single use," she said. "Plastic never goes away. So if you go to a landfill 10,000 years from now, that plastic is still going to be there ... even in a recycling center, most of that gets dumped. There is a disconnect in the way we live our lives."

## SAVING THE SEA

"That's a lot of doom and gloom. So what can we do? I tell my students there is hope. Through raising awareness among ourselves and our friends, starting in small ways ... if I can change myself, start there," Ms. Ng said.

For example, people can go to SeafoodWatch.org, developed by the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and learn how to choose sustainable seafood.

Also, by using reusable water bottles, cutlery and gro-

cery bags "you're spreading some of that awareness," she said.

Voting for elected officials "who care about the things we care about" is another way to help in the ocean conservation effort, she said. "Are they moving in the way of green energy?"

Ms. Ng said people also can get involved in advocacy groups such as Clean Ocean Action.

"We work with them at MAST. They do a fall [beach] sweep and a spring sweep, all the way down the coast from Sandy Hook to Cape May ... You'd be shocked - when the day is done, we need a truck to come and take all the bags of trash from just one beach at Sandy Hook.

"You want to reach out to advocacy groups. If you want to preserve our ocean, our natural resources, if you want them to have a voice, they need your support because a lot of these organizations are struggling. They don't have enough people helping out and they don't have enough funding to do the things they want to do."

## SUPPORTING OCEAN CONSERVATION

MAST students helped the Art for Sea group research and choose which advocacy groups to support with their fundraising this year. They

are Clean Ocean Action, the Wetlands Institute, NY NJ Baykeeper and the Littoral Society.

"We're trying to do education, as well as raising money," Ms. Crosby said, and noted that Art for Sea has monthly activities, such as visiting recycling centers.

Dorsey Lucas, one of the artists who donated her work, noted that they visited a marshland in southern New Jersey.

"A marshland is the cradle, the nursery, and if you don't have that nurturing environment, you don't have the turtles and the birds and the reptiles and other sea life that is hatching there so they can go out onto the shore and the ocean," she said.

Denise Van Dyke, another artist, said she walks along the beach daily, year-round.

"I look at the water all the time and all the waves are different every day. I do wave portraits. That's my inspiration."

Maryann Mezzacappa said, "The ocean is peaceful and tranquil and I just love that feeling. I decided to work with Art for Sea because I would like to help preserve the ocean."

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