



HIT THE BEACH! INTERNATIONAL ARTIST TO CREATE BAJA BEACH SAND SCULPTURE FOR WORLD OCEAN WEEKEND AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO

Three-dimensional, 360-degree artwork will showcase animals that will find new homes in the Pacific Seas Aquarium, which is scheduled to open later this summer

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TACOMA, Wash. – It's not summer yet, but Baja Beach is already taking shape on the main lawn at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.



At 15-to-17 feet tall and 25-to-30 feet wide, the gigantic 360-degree sand sculpture is bound to get guests at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in the mood to celebrate all manner of sea creatures during World Ocean Weekend on June 2 and 3.

Sketch by international artist Sue McGrew shows one side of the massive sand sculpture she will build at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium for World Ocean Weekend, June 2 and 3.

The weekend is a two-day homage to the life-giving role of the Earth's seas.

The sculpture also is designed to herald the coming of the zoo's Pacific Seas Aquarium, scheduled to open later this summer.

World Ocean Weekend set June 2 and 3 at Point Defiance Zoo

What: A two-day celebration of the ocean and the creatures that call it home, with emphasis on ways humans can help keep the ocean clean and healthy.

When: June 2 and 3, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Where: Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, 5400 N. Pearl St., Tacoma

What's to do: The weekend will be bursting with fun, hands-on and exciting activities, including:

- Mobile Touch Tank, for gently touching marine animals
- Marine Mammal Food Preparation area tours
- Baja Beach Sand Sculpture
- Sand play activities
- Shark Feed on Saturday; Lagoon Feed on Sunday; Seabird feed both days
- Keeper talks about polar bears and marine mammals
- Stingray Cove touch tank

Go to www.pdza.org/oceanweekend for more information.

International sand sculptor Sue McGrew, a Tacoma native, will create the work on the zoo's central lawn later this month, using a staggering 100 tons of sand. And she'll feature many of the animals to be found inside the new aquarium.

A scalloped hammerhead shark, a green sea turtle, spider crab and giant Pacific octopus will headline an entire underwater landscape sculpted by McGrew and her crew. After loading in 75 cubic yards of specially sourced sand and compacting it into wooden forms built by zoo staff, the team will take around two weeks to complete the main sculpture, as well as a smaller satellite work.

Extra sand will go into a sandbox in which kids can get in a bit of playtime. McGrew will give sand sculpting workshops on June 2-3 in a nearby demonstration area.

McGrew, 33, is one of the youngest professional sand sculptors in the U.S., appearing in competitions and festivals around the world. For two

years she was co-host of the "Sand Masters" reality TV show on the Travel Channel. She also was part of the team that broke a Guinness World Record in 2014 for the tallest sand castle ever built. They accomplished the 39-foot-tall feat near Rio de Janeiro in 2014.

She also sculpts ice and snow internationally.

McGrew first discovered sand sculpting while a high school student at Bellarmine Preparatory School. Competing in a dragon boat race at Maritime Fest, she spotted a sand sculptor at work – and was hooked. That sculptor, Bert Adams, taught her some pro-tips and eventually became her mentor.

Adams will be part of the five-person team that will help McGrew create her aquarium-themed sand sculpture at the zoo.

It's a special occasion for McGrew, who fondly recalls visiting Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium as a child.

"I have clear memories of absolute amazement peering deep into the fish tanks," she says.

During World Ocean Weekend, zoo guests will see the finished sculpture, as well as play in the sand themselves with expert tips from McGrew.



Those who also come in the days beforehand can watch sand sculpting in action. After the sand is compacted with water into the forms, McGrew begins sculpting from the top, using the forms as scaffolding and removing them as she completes each section. She has a wide variety of tools, from shovels to pastry knives and a horse brush, and even a bit of rain doesn't stop her.

Tacoma native Sue McGrew with a sand sculpture she recently completed in Japan.

"We just put on raincoats," McGrew says. "In fact, it helps compact the sand. If there's a lot of rain, we go get a coffee."

When the sculpture's done, it's coated with an environmentally-friendly glue that seals it from the weather. Depending on the sand, McGrew's sculptures have withstood even tropical storms.

The most challenging part of the zoo sculpture?

"Probably the spider crab legs," says McGrew. "They're so skinny. I'll have to support them with (sand) coral or seaweed. Sand sculpting is a kind of magic trick – you have to make something look 3D when the material is super-delicate. You always have to think about gravity. It's a fun challenge."

And the ephemerality of her art form doesn't bother McGrew – in fact, it's the best part.

"Sand sculpting is about the experience of creating and sharing your art and passion," she says. "And there is something so satisfying in knowing that once my sculpture has fulfilled its purpose, it will go back to the earth where it came from and not end up as trash in the ocean."

World Ocean Weekend also includes special animal enrichments and keeper talks, plus hands-on activities about ocean conservation. All activities are free with admission or membership to the zoo.

The Baja Beach sand sculpture will stay up through June.

For more information, see www.pdza.org/oceanweekend.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

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