A mother humpback whale and her calf.
Copyright Brandon Cole.

Gray's Reef Ocean Film Fest Makes a Splash

By Michelle Riley

The little boy's eyes widen with excitement as the humpback whale rises from the depths and seems to shoot from the sea, making a huge splash as it crashes down into the waves. The breaching whale is bigger, closer than ever before – almost close enough to touch.

Could it be? Yes, it's "Humpback Whales 3D," playing this year at the Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival!

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary celebrates the Wonders of the Ocean January 29 and 30 at the Trustees and Lucas Theaters in Historic Downtown Savannah. A wide range of offerings pack the two-day festival, featuring everything from turtles and whales to sharks and surfers.

"We can't wait to show the fantastic movies we have on deck this year, and we have new attractions, too," said Sarah Fangman, superintendent of Gray's Reef. "We're especially excited to present 3D films for the first time, and we are grateful to be able to show some stories about the healing power of the ocean, in appreciation of our military men, women and families."

In addition to "Humpback Whales 3D," which is directed by two-time Academy Award® nominee Greg MacGillivray, Gray's Reef also will screen "Jean-Michel Cousteau's Secret Ocean 3D," a beautiful gem from the famous Cousteau family. Festivalgoers will receive 3D glasses, and after the lights come up, one of America's premier whale rescuers, Ed Lyman, will speak and take questions. Lyman is known far and wide for disentangling whales from fishing line, a dangerous and breathtaking feat.

In addition to offering a visual feast, the Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival also illustrates the connection between people and the ocean. Even as the viewer delights in exploring our world beneath the sea, he or she also discovers the fragility of the marine ecosystem and the pride we can take in sanctuaries like Gray's Reef.

A fine example is "Journey to the South Pacific," a movie for all ages that takes viewers along to the island of West Papua, home to more than 2,000 species of sea life. There, narrator Cate Blanchett invites us to join Jawi, a

young island boy who encounters sea turtles, manta rays, whale sharks and other creatures that highlight the importance of living in balance with the ocean.

"In Georgia, we are fortunate to have 100 miles of beautiful Atlantic Ocean coastline," notes Fangman. "These movies show us the amazing marine animals that share our oceans, and remind us to cherish and care for our natural surroundings."

The Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival also honors Georgia's military personnel and families. "The Current" is a short film of perseverance and healing, directed by Kurt Miller and narrated by Fabien Cousteau. U.S. Army Corporal Jesse Murphree, a veteran of the Afghanistan War, is featured in the film as he learns to scuba dive and snorkel and while experiencing the healing power of the ocean.

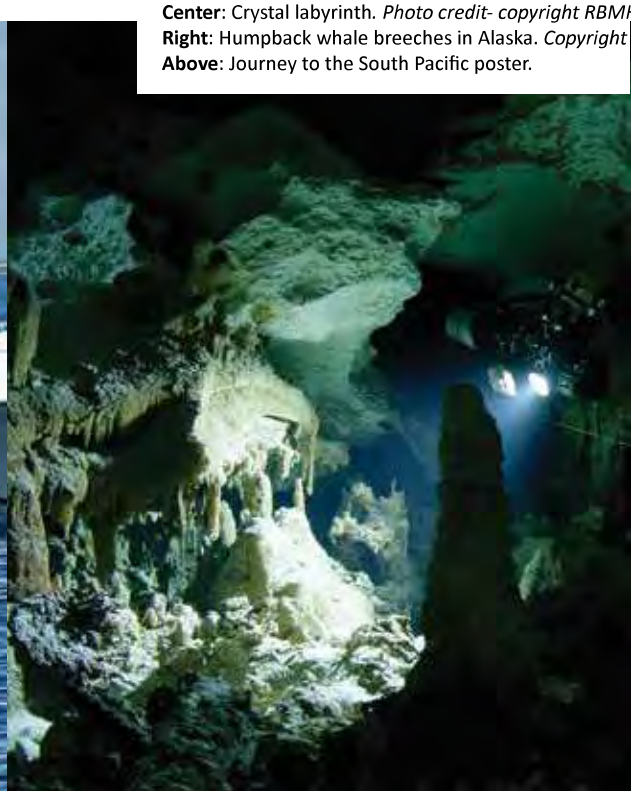
Another much-loved facet of the festival is the emerging filmmakers segment, which is open to college students, and awards First, Second and Third places to young filmmakers, including the sought-after Dr. Robert O. Levitt Emerging Filmmaker Award. Judges this year include Keenan Smart, a producer from National Geographic Television and Film, as well as Savannah's own documentary filmmaker, Jody Jenkins. The Emerging Filmmaker Award is supported by Kathryn Levitt, widow of Dr. Robert O. Levitt, who was a pioneer in dive medicine and spent time diving with the Cousteau family. Dr. Levitt was also a co-founder of the dive show "Our World Underwater."

Gray's Reef is now receiving additional assistance from a foundation that was created to support ongoing initiatives and research. Called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the organization is headed by Chairperson Cathy Sakas and Executive Director Chris Hines, a primary organizer of the festival. "I love all the 2016 film festival selections," said Hines. "I have to admit that "The Crystal Labyrinth" really got my adrenaline going! I was on the edge of my seat as the divers traveled deeper and deeper into underwater caves. Whew!"

Many of the films allow non-divers to share ocean experiences that marine scientists routinely undertake. In Guy Harvey's two films, viewers can follow an expedition to tag oceanic whitetip sharks, which Jacques Cousteau described as "the most dangerous of all sharks." Viewers can also learn about the invasive lionfish. "We recently observed our first lionfish of 2015 in Gray's Reef," said Becky Shortland, the resource protection coordinator for the sanctuary. "Lionfish are not native to the Atlantic Ocean, and they are voracious eaters. As their population continues to grow, lionfish can do immense harm to the Atlantic Ocean and to Gray's Reef. We want everyone in Georgia to be aware of this Atlantic invader and are delighted to offer this film!"

And of course, no ocean film festival is worth its saltwater without a National Geographic film. Saturday is National Geographic Night, when Gray's Reef will screen "The Secret Lives of Predators," which will show sharks and Orcas in action. The movie will be followed by a one-of-a-kind session with Emmy Award®- winning cinematographers Paul and

Left: Ed Lyman untangling a whale. *Photo provided by*
Center: Crystal labyrinth. *Photo credit- copyright RBMI*
Right: Humpback whale breeches in Alaska. *Copyright*
Above: Journey to the South Pacific poster.



Grace Atkins. The Atkins will show film clips and take questions about how they "got the shot," in a rare behind-the-scenes treat for movie lovers of all stripes. The festival will end with an onstage Wrap Party at the Lucas Theatre.

Suggested donations are $10/day for adults and $5/day for children and students. Most proceeds will benefit the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, with a portion going to benefit military families at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field.

Suggested donation to benefit Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is $10/day adults and $5/day for children and students.

To reserve seats, visit the foundation website at www.graysreefNMSF.org.

2016 Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival Line-Up:

Friday Night, January 29 – First-Ever 3D Night!
Trustees Theater

7:00 PM:
Jean-Michel Cousteau's Secret Ocean 3D
Humpback Whales 3D by Greg MacGillivray
After-Movie Honored Speaker: Ed Lyman, Humpback Whale Rescuer

Saturday, January 30 – Full Day of Film Fun!
Lucas Theatre

10:00 AM: Children's Program (kids are free!)
Journey to the South Pacific by Greg MacGillivray
Lost and Found by Philip Hunt

11:30 AM: Emerging Filmmakers Competition

2:00 PM: Guy Harvey Expedition Films:
The Oceanic White Tip Shark
Aliens of the Deep: Lionfish

3:30 PM: Appreciation of our Military, featuring adrenaline and ocean-healing films:
Earth is Blue (NOAA)
Red Bull adrenaline film
The Crystal Labyrinth by David Pearson
The Current by Kurt Miller and narrated by Fabien Cousteau
SUDS in Action (Soldiers Undertaking Disabled Scuba)

7:00 PM: National Geographic Night!
Secret Life of Predators by National Geographic
After-Movie Honored Speakers: Paul & Grace Atkins, Emmy Award®- Winning Filmmakers

9:30 PM: Wrap party on the stage!

NOAA.
H.
John Hyde & Pacific Stock