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The Clam Trail: Blending Science Education, Public Art, and Tourism

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Abstract: The Barnegat Bay Shellfish Restoration's Clam Trail is an award-winning scavenger hunt that combines science education, public art, and tourism. This family adventure has participants seeking out giant painted fiberglass clams, upweller clam nurseries, and points of interest in search of science facts to record on their forms. Upon returning these forms, the participants are given awards and chances at recognition. The project has been a very successful method of capturing the public's attention, as well as educating residents and tourists at the Jersey Shore about the Barnegat Bay and its watershed.

Introduction

It has become increasingly difficult for Extension to capture the public's attention about natural resource issues due to an explosion in media content and causes. This has forced many providers to steer toward "edutainment" experiences, which are engaging and also educational (Brain, Irani, Hodges, & Fuhrman, 2009; Williamson & Smoak, 2005). Baltimore, Atlanta, Rome, Austin, San Francisco, and Norfolk are just a few cities that have showcased decorated fiberglass statues to raise funds and awareness of an issue of local concern. Initially conceived as a fundraiser for the Barnegat Bay Shellfish Restoration Program, the Clam Trail has become the most visible part of an award winning Extension program that merges public art, science education, and tourism into a fun family experience at the Jersey Shore. This blended "edutainment" experience has proven to be an innovative and successful method of capturing the public's attention and encouraging learning.

Public Art: Giant Clams

Volunteers were initially skeptical about committing their hard-raised dollars to produce 5 1/2-foot-tall fiberglass clams. However, with a prototype developed, they sought out companies willing to sponsor the clams and the artists to paint them. In 2007, 12 clams were sponsored at a cost of \$3,500 (\$1,800 for a half shell), with \$500 paid to the artists for supplies and efforts. Initially, the clams were to be displayed for 1 year as part of the Clam Trail and then auctioned off as a fundraiser for the program. However, the clams became so popular the auction was postponed. In 2010, there are 22 on display throughout the Barnegat Bay watershed.

Science Education

A unique element in the clam trail is its focus on science education. A plaque is located with each giant clam, upweller nursery, point of interest, or "Clam Friend," a local shop selling program stickers. The plaque features a fact about shellfish, water quality, or the Barnegat Bay watershed. The public participates in a scavenger hunt by seeking and recording the bolded phrase in each fact presented, adding science education to their enjoyment of public art with their family and friends. They then submit the form through the mail or online.

Some featured locations include educational events to further increase understanding of the Barnegat Bay Watershed, its ecology, and the impact of pollution. The Barnegat Bay Shellfish Restoration's 10 upweller nurseries showcase the growing live oysters and clams, as volunteers explain how shellfish tie into the bay's ecology and are affected by pollution. In addition, the Tuckerton Seaport, Long Beach Island Foundation of Arts and Sciences, and several other museums, education centers, and points of interest offer science education to participants as they make their way across the trail.

Tourism and Marine Heritage

The shore counties of New Jersey are most dependent on and comprise the highest percentage of total tourism spending, which was \$38.8 billion statewide in 2008 (McGill, 2008). Local businesses and points of interest were quick to see incentives to participation in The Clam Trail. For either \$1,800 or \$3,500, a Giant (or half) Clam is placed in a location of their choice, most often outside their business. Their address and a photo of their business and the clam are listed on the Clam Trail Map, and the ReClam the Bay website.

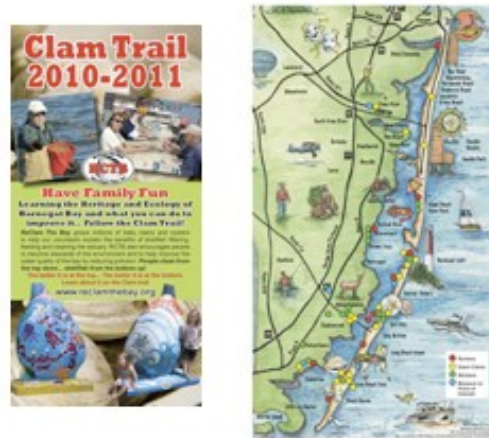
They are given the opportunity to sponsor additional advertisements on the map or Clam Trail spots on a local radio station. Even without purchasing a Giant Clam, a location can get on the map and website <<http://www.reclamthebay.org>> by selling "ReClam the Bay" bumper stickers. The maps provide the locations of restaurants and shops that support the program and thus environmental education. As people travel around the coast, looking for giant clams and upweller nurseries, they have an opportunity to support these local businesses in return.

Bringing It All Together

Fifteen thousand Clam Trail maps (Figure 1) are printed annually and distributed throughout the Barnegat Bay Watershed. The public can learn about the Clam Trail at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension office; on the Web; at lectures, upweller demonstrations and festivals; and through announcements on local radio station WJRZ. Each week the radio station announces a "Clam Digger" of the week, which may be a sponsoring business, volunteer, or a scavenger hunt participant. Participants also win prizes based on the

number of points they collect on the trail, earning stickers, pins, and t-shirts, in addition to becoming a "Clambassador" of Barnegat Bay.

Figure 1.
Clam Trail Map Front and Inside



Impact and Success

To date, 89 Clam Trail forms have been submitted. The eight forms represented in a follow-up Web survey included 21 people (nine youth, nine adults, three seniors) working on the Clam Trail activity together. This indicates that the impact is likely much higher than represented by the number of forms collected back. Participants have hailed from nine states, including Georgia, Texas, and Illinois. Fifty-four locations are featured, many of which are businesses that support the program. In 2008, the Trail was recognized by an Association of National Resource Extension Professionals Gold Innovative Program Award, as well as the New Jersey Governor's Award for Excellence in Tourism. It has been a tremendously successful way to bring more visibility to the Barnegat Bay, the Shellfish Restoration Program, and water quality issues by providing an "edutainment" experience for young and old, residents and tourists alike. More information on the Clam Trail and the Barnegat Bay Shellfish Restoration Program is available at <<http://reclamthebay.org>>.

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