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OTIS, ORE. - Three miles off Highway 101, just north of Lincoln City, lies the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology. The wind-swept grandeur of Cascade Head, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, rises above the small nonprofit's cluster of unassuming buildings. The Salmon River winds through a protected estuary below. Out front, a small meadow attracts resident elk and deer herds. Above, namesake Sitka Spruce tower skywards.

In an age of estrangement from our environment (the damaged BP oil well in the Gulf of Mexico gushed unrestrained for more than 85 days and leaks still) and diminishing outlets for creativity (even children are seeing their music and art programs disappear in the face of school budget cuts) the Sitka Center's mission to foster artistry by connecting people to place might seem improbable. A closer look, however, suggests those challenges may be the very reasons why Sitka is thriving - so much so that on August 28th, 2010, the Center will celebrate its 40th birthday.

Founded in 1970 by Frank and Jane Boyden, Sitka began as a place to teach Oregon youth about the coastal ecosystem. The original rustic wood-beam studio and its secluded location had an air of summer science camp about them, but an emphasis was placed on aesthetics to engender a deeper appreciation for the natural beauty of the area.

In the decades since, Sitka has changed in both appearance and purpose, like a ball of clay being re-centered and re-worked. Three art studios, a writing studio, an office and library, and five living quarters have grown up on the Center's original three-quarters of an acre plot. Programming is now largely for adults, who come from all over the world to take workshops taught by experts in the fields of wood-carving, print-making, shellfish gathering, painting, paper-arts, ceramics, encaustics, creative and non-fiction writing, bird-watching, kayaking, songwriting, mushroom identification, photography, fabric-arts, metal-working... even ukulele and recorder playing.

Programming is also now year-round: come the misting rains of October, until the fickle sunshine of May returns, approximately 14 emerging or established artists are chosen from nearly 200 applicants to live and work at Sitka as Artists-In-Residence. For up to three and half months, these artists are given a home and studio, free of charge, along with the quiet, conducive environment that is the Sitka campus. Combine the workshops and residencies with Sitka's special events and programming, add the community outreach offered to area residents, and nearly 4,500 individuals' lives are directly touched by the Center - perhaps hundreds of thousands more indirectly.

The effect can be profound. Every story that is written, painted, carved, or otherwise told is a bit of imagination distilled, heady with energy and potential. Creativity, Sitka maintains, offers an antidote to the expectations people so often fall prey to about what

they can be and how their worlds must run. Creativity undoes the limits people set for themselves and overcomes the stagnation and frustration inevitable in acquiescing to the status quo. So, too, does the natural world, where variety of astounding proportion is coupled with collaboration and interconnectivity.

Since 1970, the Sitka Center has sought to help people discover or re-discover these truths. The festivities planned for August 28th will celebrate the extraordinary things that can happen when people are asked to find beauty, using the land they cherish for inspiration, and then encouraged to spread that beauty widely. Sitka co-founder Frank Boyden and author David James Duncan, (*The River Why*, *The Brothers K*, and *Trout Grass*), will speak to the importance of place. Sitka instructors and artists will lead hands-on activities. Staff members will guide hikes up Cascade Head and walks on the Salmon River spit. It will be a day to honor a community that has discovered the transformative power of learning to use their own hands to shape their own lives.

All of which helps explain why Sitka continues to have such a dedicated and appreciative audience. Art and nature - each - take infinite forms. They surround us, whispering at possibilities while offering space to simply *be*. In art and nature we find truths - tight, personal truths as well as great, wide ones. For forty years, the doors of the Sitka Center have been open to those who would embark on a search for such truths; it seems quite likely such individuals will continue to seek out and be warmly welcomed at Sitka for the next forty years - and beyond.