

Student Films Showcase Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

School has been out for almost a month now, but about a dozen middle and high school students have continued their learning outside the classroom. The Baranov Museum's summer film intensive workshop has been underway for about three weeks and participants have been busy researching, conducting interviews and editing video for their very own documentary film.

Marie Acemah co taught the film intensive and said this is the third year for the program, which typically tackles a specific theme.

"So the first year it was Filipino community stories, the second year it was the tsunami and earthquake of 1964 and this year we're tackling the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Each student makes a documentary film on specific topic. So it's just a really intensive experience."

The workshop is sponsored by the school district, and they provide laptops for editing and iPads for filming. It doesn't cost anything for participants, only a three week commitment and understanding that it will require additional work outside of the three hours they meet each morning. It's open to students entering grades 7th through 12th, and high school history credits are given to those who complete the project.

This year's workshop theme was fitting, as 2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Students covered topics ranging from affects on the fishing community to how the event was portrayed in the media at the time.

Soon-to-be Senior Deborah Bitanga produced a film on what was learned from the spill and if folks are better prepared today.

"The oil pollution act was made to protect our environment and all the people that were struggling at that time. So I think we're better prepared for such an incident, on cleaning up and protecting everyone. We have a responsibility, because we all use oil — from plastics to our every day lives, driving from one place to another — so we're all a part of it. It's not just the oil companies."

Acemah said a particularly interesting topic covered by a student is the politics behind the clean up.

"Before it was the fishing ethic, work hard, make money. And that transformed into learning how to

navigate these messy political systems and some people are making money and some people have lost it all and what that does. And then the litigation just continued that process. Some people got paid, some people didn't. It all took decades, so there was a real rupture in the social fabric and we're looking at that. It's come up in every interview.

Even though the oil spill occurred well before Bitanga and her fellow classmates were born, she said it was a great experience to learn about Kodiak's history, and talk with those who did experience it first hand.

"We may never experience the Exxon Valdez but I believe that we are part of the history through this process. So it was kind of cool to be a part of it in a different way, in a unique way."

The students are indeed becoming part of the history of the spill, or at least the documentation of it. All of the raw interviews, in addition to the finished documentaries, will be archived at the Baranov Museum.

There will also be a community screening of each film on Sunday and anyone and everyone is invited. Acemah said it will be an opportunity for students share their work, but also for folks to provide feedback.

"So if there's something that needs to be corrected or shifted or even just an idea that comes out of it, that's really a chance to capture that because this isn't just a project for the students, it's a project for the community."

The screening will start at 5 p.m. at the Kodiak Public Library on Sunday.