

By **SUSAN BANNING**
Day Staff Writer

Festivals in this region tend to fall into a few categories: food, music or art. The organizers often plan part of the events with children in mind, but nothing was really ever dedicated to them.

That is, until Fish Tales, Tugs & Sails, an increasingly popular summer day on Waterfront Park in downtown New London, came along.

Children are the focus of this festival, with a day's worth of activities to keep everyone from stroller-size to teenage happy, as well as their parents. The theme this year is "Explore the Blue Planet," and children's authors and illustrators, entertainers and community organizations will be on hand to combine environmental awareness with a fun summer day.

In its third year, the event will be held July 26 from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Attendance has grown as the word of mouth surrounding Fish Tales, Tugs

& Sails has circulated. Organizers counted about 5,000 people in 2007 and expect about 7,500 this year.

"It's really been growing," said Kimberly Bartlett, the promotion coordinator for New London Main Street, which co-produces the event with Mitchell College Children's Learning Center and the Public Library of New London.

Some of the exciting stuff going on includes the ever-popular Build-a-Bear, whose mascot will be on hand with giveaways and prize packages for children who have entered a drawing contest. Mystic Aquarium will be there with a traveling exhibit, and roaming pirates will delight

everyone with their dialect and their dress.

Some big names in the children's entertainment world are expected, including Art Farm's Circle for a Fragile Planet, a theater troupe that focuses on environmental issues. Other performers include the Grumbling Gryphons Children's Theater, who recruit children to perform on stage. Mad Science, a popular mainstay at area schools, will be there, as well as Serious Coyote, a group that performs folk and traditional music on 30 handcrafted instruments.

Mystic Seaport is represented with Tale of the Whaler, a very interactive and fun play, with more opportunities for kids to get onstage.

"There is so much going on," Bartlett said. "Last year, we found it was sometimes hard to keep the kids' attention on what was happening onstage. We want kids to be involved in performances."

There is also an authors and illustrators tent, and a highlight will be a reading by the granddaughter of Hardie Gramatky, who wrote "Little Toot." It has been republished, and Linda Gramatky will read it.

The illustrators will be demonstrating their craft, as just readings tend to relax the audience.

"Some kids will fall asleep when there is just reading," Bartlett said.

Another facet of the festival is the chance to tour boats, including the Mystic Whaler and a Project Oceanology ship. They can also go for rides in tugboats.

"The boats captivate kids from the very little all the way through the teens," Bartlett said.

If this whole event is reminiscent of the former Boats Books and Brushes, you're not imagining it. Bartlett said that the city asked New London Main Street to create events to use Waterfront Park. In concert with their

See page 22

Kids Choice

DOWNTOWN NEW LONDON'S FISH TALES, TUGS AND SAILS
IS DESIGNED WITH CHILDREN IN MIND

KIDS GET TAKEN ON A
TUGBOAT RIDE AT NEW
LONDON'S FISH TALES,
TUGS AND SAILS.

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MYSTIC WHALER