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## College of Marin sets groundbreaking for Bolinas marine lab project



A crew works on the demolition of the College of Marin marine laboratory in Bolinas on Tuesday, June 1, 2021. The college plans to build a new center. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

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In 2005, the College of Marin shut down one of its prized assets: a marine laboratory and field station at Bolinas Lagoon.

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“Over the past 10 years, it appeared at times this project would be impossible to complete,” said David Wain Coon, the college president. “The road to get to this point has been long, but well worth it.”

The center will enrich science students who otherwise might not have access to a working field station and marine laboratory, Wain Coon said. It also offers a rich location.

“It’s on the edge of two significant and major ecological areas — across the street from the Bolinas Lagoon and 1 mile from Duxbury Reef,” Wain Coon said.

Keith Rosenthal, the school’s director of advancement, said that when the project is completed, College of Marin will be one of only two community colleges in the state with coastal field stations. Mendocino College has one near Point Arena, he said.

“This will afford what could be a life-changing opportunity for many students who would otherwise not have access to study our critical marine and terrestrial systems,” he said.

Rosenthal has raised from individuals and foundations at least \$1.9 million over the past year to close the gap between the project cost and the funding at hand, and he is now ramping up efforts to seek contributions for the remaining \$500,000.

Much of the funding already in place has come from voter-approved Measure B bond proceeds, he said. The rest has come from individual donors and foundations.

A fundraising event is planned for April 30 at Audubon Canyon Ranch in Stinson Beach. More information is online at [advancement.marin.edu/bolinas-field-station](http://advancement.marin.edu/bolinas-field-station).

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Mueller, a former student of the lab's early founders more than 50 years ago, returned as the program's lead instructor. In 2017, he was so frustrated by the years of bureaucratic roadblocks that he went public in a video rant before a crowd at the Bolinas fire station. The video, which was on Twitter but is no longer available, went viral among science-lovers and alumni of the marine program.

A few months later, the college's faculty produced the equivalent of a treatise on why all the legal, financial, governmental and engineering arguments against building a new facility were flawed. The treatise and continued lobbying efforts eventually led to the college's commitment to build the facility in 2019. The cost estimate then was \$3 million.

In 2021, the old complex was demolished and design permits and approval processes at the state and county levels accelerated. Final county and state permits and approvals were issued on Jan. 5, the college said.

Mueller said the center's benefits will be both global, for environmental research, and local, for Marin's underserved students.

"The Bolinas Field Station and its marine biology curriculum will provide access to a broad spectrum of Californians who, but for a field station operated in the community college system, would not have the opportunity to experience hands-on science," Mueller said in an email.

"Many former COM students who went on to obtain post-graduate degrees in the sciences have cited their experience at the COM's former Bolinas Field Station as

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Beyond the diversity and equity issues, there is the larger picture of global environmental challenges. Studying at Bolinas Lagoon and Duxbury Reef could give a new generation of science students a foundation for further research to help the planet, Mueller said.

"This is the creation of an epicenter for community involvement and collaboration in addressing the collapsing ecosystem, and the training ground to create and educate the next generation of environmental stewards," Mueller said.

As the project enters the final stage, Wain Coon praised the efforts of Mueller and "the dedicated faculty who championed the project," as well as "COM's board of trustees, who ensured we exhausted all possibilities to make it happen."

"The field station's location will enable the continuation of the science-based education and research that COM's faculty and students began over 50 years ago," he said.

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