Above Trinidad’s vast Pacific coastline sits Memorial Lighthouse, walking distance from Humboldt State University’s Marine Lab. Look to the left, atop the bluff and you’ll see offshore rocks with weathered faces from the icy winds and crushing waves. This is Jon Forrest Dohlin’s fondest memory of living in Humboldt County, a place he calls home.

Dohlin is the vice president of the Wildlife Conservation Society and the director of the New York Aquarium. **Dohlin graduated from HSU in 1992 with a bachelor’s degree in biology.** As an undergraduate student, Dohlin had no idea where his education would take him.

Flipping through the glossy pages of a National Geographic magazine, Dohlin came across an article about the expansion of the Redwood National Forest. Upon seeing pictures of the large redwood trees married with the Pacific Ocean, Dohlin knew he wanted to attend HSU.

“It’s the only place I applied to,” he said,

Dohlin moved to Arcata at the age of 17.

“I grew up in L.A. feeling like a misfit,” he said. “I had this romantic idea that I wanted to be in the outdoors and live in a rural environment away from the big cities.”

Dohlin was originally drawn to HSU’s wildlife conservation management program but turned to
biology — a better fit for his full-time work schedule.

During his 11-year stay in Arcata, Dohlin put himself through school working in bars and nightclubs including Mojo’s — a nightclub that hosted bands like X, The Blasters and the Jerry Garcia Band.

“In the early ‘80s Humboldt was a pretty happening music scene,” Dohlin said.

Not only was Dohlin involved in the music scene, he was an original player for HSU’s ultimate frisbee team, The Buds.

Dohlin continued to go to school but worried about how he would make a career in the field of biology.

“When I was getting a degree in biology I asked myself, ‘Does this fascinate me?’” Dohlin said. “I couldn’t see myself as a scientist or working in a lab. I didn’t have a plan.”

After Dohlin graduated from HSU, he pursued a master’s degree in architecture focusing on sustainable and green building at Parson School for Design in New York. In 1997 Dohlin brought his love of biology into architecture when he began working as a designer for the Wildlife Conservation Society.

“You learn the value of how things work and it allows you to think much more deeply,” Dohlin said. Dohlin worked on the Bronx Zoo’s Congo Gorilla Forest and was involved in designing tiger, jellyfish and coral exhibits.

In 2008, Dohlin was named the director of the New York Aquarium where he is currently working on a new shark exhibit.

Even though Dohlin lives 3,000 miles away he said, “I’m still Humboldt State University’s biggest booster.”

Living in the East Coast, Dohlin is surrounded by alumni from Yale, Princeton and Columbia. But Dohlin feels the education he received at HSU contests with degrees from Ivy League Universities.

“My education was as good as theirs,” Dohlin said.

Dohlin credits his educational experience at HSU to the personal attention he received from his professors as well as their commitment to their students.

“The professors [at HSU] were really amazingly influential. I knew my professors and my professors knew me.”

**Professors including Dr. Tim Lawlor, Dr. Richard Meyers, Dr. Dave Kitchen, Dr. Sue Lee and Merle Friel greatly influenced Dohlin during his educational stay at HSU.**
“They changed me from a romantic approach [to biology] to a more discipline approach,” Dohlin said.

**Dr. Sue Lee worked in HSU’s department of biology until she retired in 1996.** She remembers teaching many students with the same romantic notions towards the sciences.

“Believe me, I’ve had many students like that,” Lee said. “Students come to Humboldt because they know how exceptional the science and natural resource planning programs are. It’s wonderful to hear what students have accomplished. I’m very proud of him and I’m very gratified he mentioned me.”

Dohlin’s three children are well aware of HSU from listening to their dad rave about what the school and area has to offer. But for Dohlin, there is a dark side to Humboldt and it is not the constant overcast sky.

“The saddest thing about living in Humboldt,” he said, “is you see people come and go.”

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