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# Film : Sylvia Earle & "Mission Blue" at Chilmark Community Center

By Brooks Robards  
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Photo by Bryce Groark

See excerpts from an almost-complete documentary, "Mission Blue," Wednesday at the Chilmark Community Center.

It's hard to convey adequately the importance of Sylvia Earle's upcoming appearance at the Chilmark Community Center on Wednesday, July 6. One of the world's foremost oceanographers, Dr. Earle will join the audience in watching scenes from "Mission Blue," Menemsha summer resident Bob Nixon's documentary-in-progress, and comment on them.

Dr. Earle and her Mission Blue initiative to rescue the world's oceans make up the subject of the film, which is now in the editing stage. With principal photography just finished, Mr. Nixon expects to complete and release "Mission Blue" this winter. The director will join Dr. Earle at this Martha's Vineyard Film Festival (MVFF) event.

The story of Dr. Earle's Mission Blue initiative is one of optimism and determination in the face of the dying state of the world's oceans. Dr. Earle won the Sapling Foundation's TED (Technology Entertainment and Design) Prize in 2009 and chose as her world-changing wish to inaugurate a global network of marine-protected areas, dubbed Hope Spots.

Eighteen Hope Spots have already been set up, including ones in the Sargasso Sea, the Gulf of California, the Micronesia Islands, and the Gulf of Mexico. Calling the oceans the earth's "blue heart," Dr. Earle points out that only 1 percent of the world's oceans are protected, compared to 12 percent of its land mass.

Dubbed "Her Deepness" and the "Sturgeon General" because of the force of her ideas, Dr. Earle convened 100 scientists, explorers, environmentalists, activists, and artists in the Galápagos Islands in April 2010 to brainstorm ways to educate and take action to save the ocean.

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"I have spent a lot of time on the Cape, especially when I was a research Fellow at Harvard [1966-1975] and for many years as member of the Corporation and later a trustee of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. I have flown over Martha's Vineyard, sailed around the Island, and looked longingly from the mainland but have not yet actually touched the Island itself. So the July 6 visit will be really special," the Oakland, Calif., resident said. A National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence who is in constant demand worldwide, she will leave the next day for conferences in Hong Kong.

Bob Nixon, director of "Mission Blue," has been chairman of the Washington, D.C.-based Earth Conservation Corps since 2004. The nonprofit employs disadvantaged kids to restore the environment, including the once-polluted Anacostia River in the nation's capital.

This work comes in addition to Mr. Nixon's many producing, directing, and writing credits in TV and film. Best known may be "Gorillas in the Mist," the film he produced about the late Dian Fossey that stars Sigourney Weaver.

"My life plan was to be a marine biologist," Mr. Nixon said. When he flunked biology in high school, he decided to make films about the ocean instead. His numerous documentaries include "Endangered Species" and "America the Beautiful."

He connected with Dr. Earle after a friend who had just been introduced to her work called the filmmaker and asked if he would consider making a documentary about the Mission Blue project. Mr. Nixon said the oceanographer's one request to him was, "Please make a hopeful film."

"We hadn't planned on the Gulf spill," he said. His crew ended up spending a lot of time in the Gulf, where he talked with local fishermen, as well as focusing on the Gulf's vanishing wildlife population. "It's the wildlife we're destroying," he said.

The longtime Vineyard summer resident said, "When I was 15, I hitchhiked up here [to the Vineyard] so I could fish for bluefish." He and his family have been coming ever since, dividing their time between Washington, D.C. and Menemsha.

His love of antiques and interest in restoring old homes led to his purchase, first, of the Menemsha Inn, which abuts his property, and, more recently The Home Port Restaurant.

In addition to "Mission Blue," he has two other film projects underway. The subject for an as-yet untitled IMAX production is sperm whales. Filmed on the Caribbean island of Dominica, he said, it contains never-before-seen footage of the genus. A second film project concerns marine biologist Shane Gero, who studies sperm whales, decoding their language and family units.

*"Mission Blue" excerpts and discussion, Wednesday, July 6, 8 pm, Chilmark Community Center. \$12; \$6 members at the door or online until 8 am the day of the event at [tmvff.org](http://tmvff.org).*

*Brooks Robards, a frequent contributor to The Times, divides her time between Oak Bluffs*



and Northampton.

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