

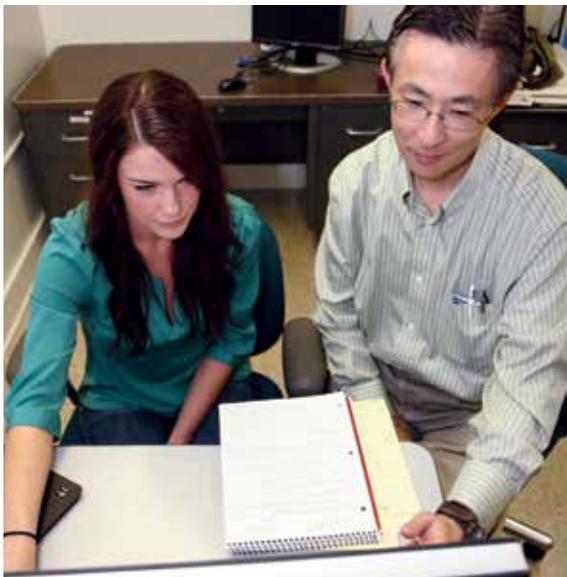
in the northwest Pacific Ocean region of the country and possible correlations to the sea lions' hunting capabilities and choice of prey animals. He hopes to determine if a change in or movement of the prey animals has hampered the sea lions' ability to find and catch food, which may be responsible for an 80 percent decline in their populations over the past 40 years.

Giddens, mentored by WFS Assistant Professor Dr. Luis Hurtado, sampled blue crab DNA from nine sites spread between South Padre Island and Tampa, Fla., to determine if these populations are genetically different from each other. The results may lead to better management of blue crab populations.

Nunez, a student of Associate Professor of Marine Biology Dr. Antoinetta Quigg, sought to determine if sodium bicarbonate — baking soda — can become a less expensive source of carbon for growing microscopic marine algae and if limiting nitrogen would increase the amount of fat the microalgae produce. The fat burns at a high temperature and can potentially replace some of the petroleum in fuel blends. The resulting alternative fuel releases less carbon dioxide during burning than does traditional petroleum-based fuel.

More information about the Texas Sea Grant Scholars Program is available at <http://texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu/WhatWeDo/UndergraduateResearchScholarsProgram2013.html>.

— Jim Hiney



Cyreneia Millberry analyzes data from her research with Dr. Masami Fujiswara. Millberry was one of three Texas Sea Grant Scholars to present her findings at Texas Undergraduate Research Day in Austin.

PHOTO BY JIM HINEY/TEXAS SEA GRANT

## La Petite Belle sets sail



PHOTO COURTESY TED RICCIO

La Petite Belle, a half-size replica of La Salle's square-rigger, is sailing the bays near Palacios.

After a decade of work by Palacios residents, *La Petite Belle* had its maiden voyage in February. The ship, a half-size, seaworthy replica of *La Belle*, the ship of famed French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, is sailing Tres Palacios Bay and Matagorda Bay, where the wreck of the original 17th century ship was discovered by divers in 1995.

*La Petite Belle* is part of the La Salle Odyssey, an exhibit that narrates the story of the first European settlements in Texas. The vessel was constructed to be a tourist attraction for Palacios, an icon for LaSalle and his expedition, and an example of classic square riggers.

The project to build the *La Petite Belle* began in 2002 with the tenacious efforts of the late Roberta Ripke from the Palacios Area Fund (see Texas Shores, Spring/Summer 2012) and Lane Hollister. Models of what the ship would look like were created with the help of square-rigger reconstruction programs such as George Washington's *Federalist* and John Paul Jones' *Providence*, as well as other naval archives from the Smithsonian Institution.

Construction concluded in December 2012 with the help of local resident Barney Gulley and Ted Riccio, Chairman of the Distribution Committee for the Palacios Area Fund. While Riccio took care of the administration aspect of the project, Gulley acted as construction manager. "He is responsible for the way the boat looks now," Riccio says. Ownership of *La Petite Belle* was recently transferred to the Palacios Area Historical Association.

The vessel, which was commissioned in April 2013, is 30 feet long and 8 feet wide, and weighs 15,000 pounds. Though it has the appearance of a wooden ship, the materials used for its construction are modern — a fiberglass hull and cedar or pressure-treated pine decks. The masts are welded aluminum and its cleats, bollards and rails are attached with epoxy and stainless steel screws. Though the ship is equipped to sail perpendicular to the wind, she also has a diesel engine for times when the winds are contrary.

— Roberto Molar-Candanosa