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Sea Hunter Earns PhD in Archaeology at SFU

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World renowned maritime archaeologist James Delgado, co-host of The Sea Hunters television program and executive director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum, says he's a much better archaeologist now that he has completed his PhD in archaeology at Simon Fraser University. "The day you stop learning is the day you might as well check out," says Delgado, who will soon take up a new position as executive director of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology in Texas. "This has been wonderful, these last five years at SFU." Delgado's PhD thesis is a synthesis of 28 years of field work delving into the rise of San Francisco as a port. During his many shipwreck explorations around the world, including forays into the Titanic, Delgado spent a lot of time digging through a nine square block area of downtown San Francisco that is topped with high-rises. Beneath them lies the almost perfectly preserved, partially burned remains of San Francisco's original port. "We found entire ships still filled with cargo and stores that had partially burned and collapsed into the bay with their merchandise - including perfectly preserved items of clothing, shoes, bottles of booze, foodstuffs, even packages of biscuits." During the San Francisco fire, people immediately threw sand over everything, effectively sealing up what was left of the port. "It's a gold rush Pompeii." Delgado says that while most people connect San Francisco's gold rush fever with the libertine ways of a gold-maddened crowd - the best guns, the finest wines and the best of the worst things that money could buy - the archaeological dig has discovered a different story. "The bulk of stuff that was found was the stuff used to build a permanent home," he notes. "The everyday staples of life. We were finding Tennant's ale from Glasgow, wines from France, bricks from Baltimore, axes from Connecticut, barley and beans from Chile, lumber from Australia." While some gold rush revellers did travel overland to San Francisco, the majority came by sea, he says, and all they needed came in the hold of a ship. "The global society we live in today has always existed at sea," says Delgado. "San Francisco owes its rise to its worldwide connections to other markets by ship."