

VIRGINIA AQUARIUM
**ANNUAL
REPORT**
FISCAL YEAR 2023

A stylized world map with green continents and blue oceans, set against a blue globe background. The map is centered on the Atlantic Ocean, showing North America, South America, Europe, and Africa. The text "THINK GLOBAL" is overlaid on the map.

**THINK
GLOBAL**



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DEAR FRIENDS & SUPPORTERS,

As humans, our connection to the environment is strong. We depend on nature, not as something that is nice to experience but rather essential to our survival. The human footprint is growing at the fastest pace in our history, and the human need for natural resources continues to stress our natural world. All our actions over the next few years will impact the survival of our planet for generations to come. Recognizing action is necessary. The Virginia Aquarium provides a window into nature, a key pillar as we launched our new strategic plan in September 2022.

Saving wildlife and their ecosystems is our history and our future. During the past year, the City of Virginia Beach, Foundation Board, Aquarium staff, and volunteers recommitted themselves to a renewed vision: to be a driver in conservation, education, tourism, and sustainability, leading the charge to save wildlife and their ecosystems.

The world is changing rapidly, so we must respond to the challenges and opportunities before us. The challenges are greater than ever, but with our supporters' focus, dedication, and passion, we will continue to set the bar for science, conservation action, animal husbandry, education, and tourism, which has driven our success in protecting wildlife and their ecosystems.

We thank you for your contribution to our future and your continued support for our ambitious plan to engage with a rapidly changing world.

With gratitude,



Cynthia W. Spanoulis
Executive Director



Salvatore J. DaBiero
Chair of the Board | 2022–2023

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A NEW PATH OF EXCELLENCE

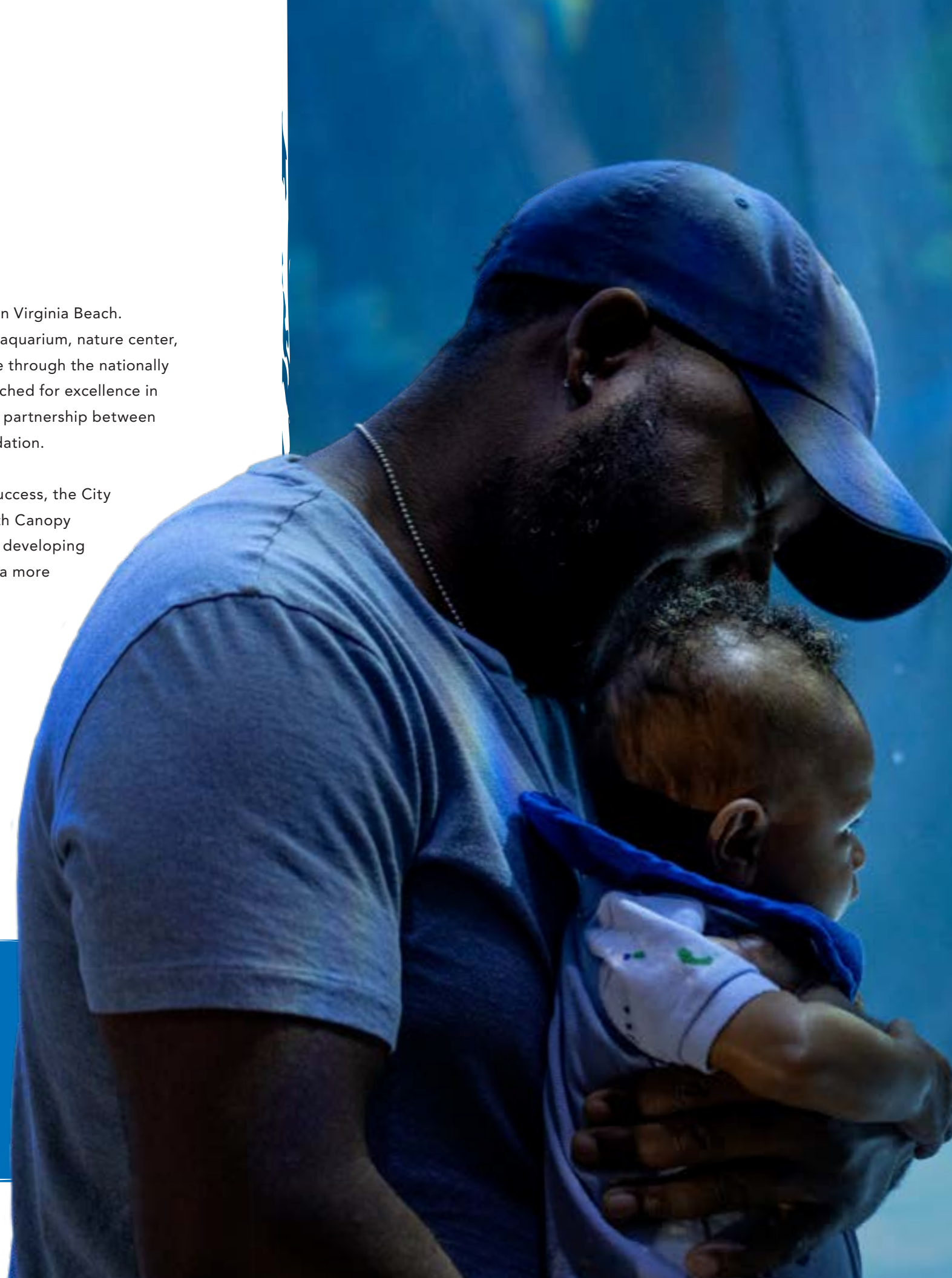
For over 37 years, the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center has been an icon in Virginia Beach. Whether by creating incredible memories for guests through an innovative blend of aquarium, nature center, and science museum best practices, or by ambitiously monitoring Virginia's coastline through the nationally recognized Stranding Response Program, the Virginia Aquarium has consistently reached for excellence in every aspect of its work. This work results from of a hugely successful public-private partnership between the City of Virginia Beach and the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation.

In the spirit of perpetual pursuit of excellence and building strong foundations of success, the City leadership, Board members, staff, and volunteers participated for over one year with Canopy Strategic Partners to involve Aquarium stakeholders in the process of visioning and developing an action-oriented plan that connects people to the marine environment to inspire a more sustainable future. The process comprised of three elements:

- 1 Strategic Planning, which solidified the Aquarium's identity, commitments, and culture, paving the way for success over the next five years.
- 2 Master Planning, which imagined the Aquarium's future through long-term expansion and growth.
- 3 Business Planning, which identified the performance opportunities that these plans unlock and the resources needed to achieve them.

The result was a new mission and vision statement, refreshed values, and six pillars of future focus for the next five years.

OUR NEW MISSION
TO CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE
MARINE ENVIRONMENT, INSPIRING
A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.



OUR NEW VISION

To be a driver in conservation, education, tourism, and sustainability, leading the charge to save wildlife and their ecosystems.

OUR REFRESHED VALUES

Curious

We are always eager to learn. We're committed to pursuing the latest science and research available in our field, asking questions, and striving to be informed and informative.

Innovative

We bravely pursue and are willing to try new ideas. Even mistakes help us learn and grow.

Respectful

Every team member has value. Our team's diverse perspectives and experiences make us stronger. We listen, share, and learn from each other.

Authentic

We are committed to caring for our animals, teammates, communities, and guests. We are transparent and accountable to each other and ourselves.

Welcoming

Our doors are open. We aim to be a place where all staff, communities, and guests feel welcome.

PILLARS OF FUTURE FOCUS

Becoming a destination

We will provide a memorable, compelling experience that will be a primary reason to visit to Virginia Beach.

Supporting our team

We will invest in a culture that nurtures our team members' growth and well-being.

Stewarding our resources

We will be responsible for our financial resources while working to sustain our natural resources.

Saving species & ecosystems

We will actively engage in conservation projects that positively impact mission-related species and the habitats on which they depend.

Cultivating community

We will build relationships with our neighbors and partners, helping them connect to and care for waterways and ecosystems.

Learning for all

We value the act of learning and discovery. Our educational identity embodies curiosity, exploration, collaboration, and empowerment. We help people develop personal connections to the natural world and inspire them to take action.

ENDANGERED TOMISTOMA HATCHING SUCCESS

A MONUMENTAL YEAR FOR THE TOMISTOMA SPECIES SURVIVAL PLAN

The Aquarium's herpetology team successfully hatched two tomistoma eggs in September 2022, becoming only the 6TH Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) facility to do so. The eggs were laid following several years of breeding attempts by Ralf and Sommer, the first tomistoma imported from a home range country since the 1973 passage of the Endangered Species Act.

As they approach their first birthday, the yet unnamed hatchlings are growing fast, quadrupling their hatch weight and measuring 20 inches long! Though long-term arrangements are still being finalized, the current plan is to send them to an AZA partner, where they will eventually enter the Tomistoma Species Survival Plan as two of the most genetically valuable members of their species in the United States.

OSPREY ACCOLADES

At the International Marine Animal Trainers Association (IMATA) and Animal Behavioral Management Alliance 2023 joint conference, Senior Keeper Keriann Pflieger presented the Virginia Aquarium's work with Osprey Watch. The presentation covered the mission of Osprey Watch, the Aquarium and their collaborative hands-on conservation research in Virginia Beach. Pflieger was awarded second place out of 150 papers in the conservation initiative category for her presentation and the Aquarium's work.

EXHIBIT RENOVATIONS

The iconic exhibit featuring four harbor seals experienced a series of closures over the past two years. The exhibit initially reopened in August 2022 but closed again during the spring to modify the seams to the viewing windows. The exhibit successfully reopened on May 30, 2023.

A new vinyl floor surrounds the Ray Touch exhibit, which reopened in late September 2022 and guests can again see and touch the cownose and southern rays.

INSPIRING EDUCATION



521

EDUCATION
PROGRAMS

14,585

STUDENTS REACHED
IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL

240

CAMPERS IN 19
CAMP PROGRAMS

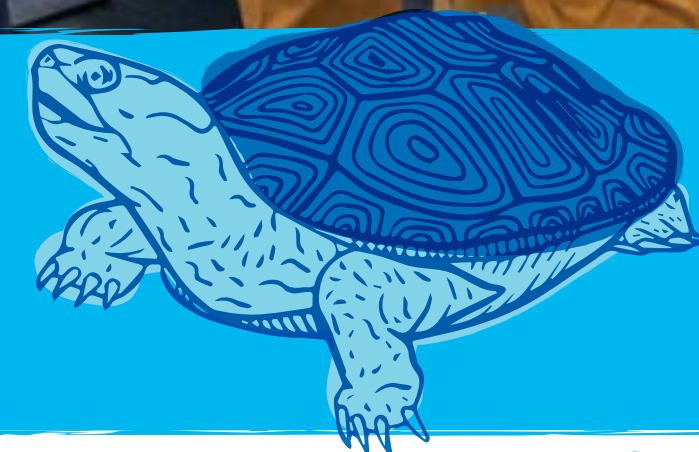
EDUCATION PROGRAM'S STRONG RETURN

This year, the Foundation saw a strong return to in-person education programs. During FY23, our Education staff completed 251 outreach programs, serving 6,736 school children. The outreach programs reached across the Commonwealth of Virginia, including students from Chesapeake, Hampton, Harrisonburg, Highland Springs, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Richmond, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg, Windsor, and York County.

Through a grant from the Youth Service Club Foundation, students from W.T. Cooke Elementary in Virginia Beach received an Aquarium visit or outreach program. Tracy Koprowski posted on Twitter, "Wow! Many thanks to the Virginia Aquarium for an amazing outreach program, "T" is for Turtle! Our kindergarteners were so engaged and excited to learn all about turtles. They even got to meet a diamondback terrapin! So cool!!!"



“OUR KINDERGARTENERS WERE SO ENGAGED AND EXCITED TO LEARN ALL ABOUT TURTLES. THEY EVEN GOT TO MEET A DIAMONDBACK TERRAPIN!”



CAMP EXPLORERS

From ages four to 15, the Virginia Aquarium hosted 240 curious explorers for scientific learning, games, crafts, animal encounters with our Animal Ambassadors, and more! Through 19 camps that ran during the winter, spring, and a sold-out summer, youth campers safely connected with animals, peers, and the natural world.



IMPACTFUL GIFTS

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center is back in the classroom, teaching marine science to students across the Hampton Roads region. With a gift from PRA Group, Inc., the Virginia Aquarium continued its virtual and in-person education programs to schools in Norfolk, Hampton, and Danville.

The Virginia Aquarium served more than 1,900 students in kindergarten through 7th grade. Program topics varied and were curated to meet curriculum and SOL requirements for each grade level.

WATTS CONSERVATION SPEAKER SERIES

The special lecture series, the Eleanor and Henry Watts Conservation Speaker Series, continued during 2022-2023 with three events.

WHY SHARKS MATTER

On July 7, 2022, marine conservation biologist and award-winning science educator Dr. David Shiffman gave valuable insight on the world of shark science and conservation. His lecture highlighted these incredible animals and what can be done to protect them from their biggest threat: humans.

RIISING SEA LEVEL: FACTS AND FICTION

The Virginia Aquarium hosted noted author, oceanographer, and sea level rise expert, John Englander on October 13, 2022. Mr. Englander reviewed the latest scientific projections and presented a visionary outlook for what we need to do, showing the world how to survive and even thrive for ourselves and future generations.

SECORE INTERNATIONAL: BREEDING FUTURE CORAL GENERATIONS

On April 19, 2023, the Watts Conservation Speaker Series featured Dr. Valérie F. Chamberland (pictured left), a Research Scientist at SECORE International, a leading institution in the field of research, technology development, and the implementation of new restoration methods for coral reefs. Her research aims to better understand corals during their earliest and most vulnerable life stages, with a particular focus on identifying conditions under which they will survive, grow, and thrive.



AQUARIUM EVENTS

The Virginia Aquarium hosted a variety of events throughout the year to celebrate holidays, fundraising and communities. Guest favorites such as Pride Family Night, Sensory-Friendly Mornings, Sharks After Dark, and Turtle Trot all returned for their regular iterations and thanks to PRA Group Inc., we closed 2022 with our holiday tradition, Fins & Frights and Holi-Rays, to celebrate the spooky and winter seasons.



MERMAID MAGIC

Something mer-magical happened this year! Guests stepped into an enchanting world to enjoy an evening of special mermaid encounters, photo opportunities, and engaging activities during Mermaids at the Virginia Aquarium.



OCEAN COMMOTION SUCCESS

The Virginia Aquarium's annual gala fundraiser and online auction, 2022 Ocean Commotion, sponsored by Capital Group, reached a gross of \$185,875.65 with \$102,500 from sponsorships, \$52,957 from the auction, and \$30,418.65 in in-kind gifts. The net of \$125,489.74 is more than \$10,000 over last year and the highest in the history of the event. From September 19 to October 8, over 700 local and out-of-state supporters registered to participate in the online auction sponsored by Checkered Flag.



LOVE BITES RETURNS

Back for a second year, the Virginia Aquarium's staff provided some anti-Valentine's fun where the broken-hearted could feed their ex to one of the Aquarium's resident animals! Supporters explored the menu of feeder items and received a video of one of our resident animals devouring their ex along with a custom V-Day card. Sponsored by Melone Hatley, P.C., Your Partner in Divorce.



ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

On May 10, 2023, the Virginia Aquarium hosted the 23rd Annual Virginia Aquarium Golf Classic, sponsored by Rivers Casino Portsmouth. A full field of 144 golfers hit the green to help raise more than \$100,000 to support the Virginia Aquarium Foundation, making this the highest gross revenue ever in the event's history. The weather was beautiful, and golfers had three different chances to win a Mercedes Benz, pontoon boat, or a street-legal golf cart.



STRANDING RESPONSE

92

MARINE MAMMAL
Strandings

333

SEA TURTLE
Strandings

79

SEA TURTLES
Rehabilitated
& Released



A LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

A loggerhead sea turtle named Dave Matthews Band (DMB) was admitted in June 2021 after being found floating with slice wounds on its carapace from a vessel strike and pneumonia. The turtle was in critical condition and required emergency intensive care for several days. After spending nearly two years in our care, which cost an estimated \$39,000, DMB overcame difficult hurdles, regained swimming strength, and was released back to the ocean.

WHALE STRANDING EVENTS

Staff from the Stranding Response Team coordinated and provided rapid response to nine large whale stranding events in our region, which included investigation and documentation through post-mortem investigations and disposal. One event included a critically endangered North Atlantic right whale stranded on Chesapeake Bay Beach and involved city, state, and federal agencies.



SHELL-EBRATING CITY HISTORY

To celebrate the City of Virginia Beach's 60TH anniversary, the Aquarium designated the naming theme for this year's hooked sea turtle season to be districts, landmarks, and waterways throughout Virginia Beach, such as Cape Henry, Pembroke, and False Cape. As a department of the City of Virginia Beach, the Virginia Aquarium paid homage to the City's rich history with this year's special sea turtle naming theme while aiming to educate local anglers and minimize harm to sea turtles during hooking events.





CHANGING EXHIBITS

RESCUE

RESCUE invited guests to experience and react to high-pressure, rescue-based scenarios during land, sea, and air rescues. The changing exhibit was on display from September 2022 through January 2023.



DISCOVER STEAMPUNK

Discover Steampunk: A Fantastical Hands-On Adventure brought STEAM education to the Virginia Aquarium from January through May 2023. The exhibit featured intricate inventions inspired by the Victorian ideals of industry and steam power to teach about innovation and the disciplines of STEAM: science, technology, engineering, art, and math.



DMACC DEDICATION

A ceremony was held to dedicate the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's Darden Marine Animal Conservation Center (DMACC) on Thursday, August 25, 2022. This is a state-of-the-art facility for the Stranding Response Program is the first of its kind on the East Coast. The Virginia Aquarium was pleased to commemorate the newly constructed facility and honor the esteemed Darden family during a small private ceremony, which included Governor Glenn Youngkin.

MURAL PROJECT

The Virginia Aquarium teamed up with the City of Virginia Beach's Cultural Affairs Department on a mural project in September 2022, which sought an artist to design and paint a large mural that would transform the Aquarium's facade into an inspiring and welcoming moment for visitors and passersby.



RENEWED AZA ACCREDITATION

In March 2023, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) approved the Virginia Aquarium's accreditation for another five-year period. As the primary accrediting body for zoos and aquariums in North America, AZA's accreditation process is one of the most thorough and rigorous in the industry. Fewer than 10 percent of the nearly 2,800 animal exhibitors licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture have received AZA accreditation, and we are proud to have held this accreditation since 2007.



AQUARIUM STAFF PUBLISH WORK

This fiscal year, a number of publications were authored or co-authored by Veterinary Science and Research staff.

Daniel, Costidis, Barco, 2023. Fatal entanglements of sea turtles caused by widely deployed weather instruments. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*.

Rose, Bates, McNaughton, O'Hara, Barco, 2022. Characterizing Sea Turtle Bycatch in the Recreational Hook and Line Fishery in Southeastern Virginia, USA. Published in *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, 21(1):63-73.

Mones, A. B., Heniff A, Harms CA, Balko JA. Evaluation of intracardiac administration of potassium chloride, ivermectin, and lidocaine hydrochloride for euthanasia of anesthetized blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*). 2023. *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine*.

Mones, A. B., Santangelo, S. M., Gorges, M. A., Lewbart, G. A., Gerard, M. P., & Harrison, T. M. (2023). Evaluation of lidocaine for brachial plexus blockade in eastern box turtles (*Terrapene carolina*). *Veterinary Anesthesia and Analgesia*, 50(1), 98-101.

Mones, A. B., Thompson AE, Knych H, Sanchez-Migallon Guzman D, Petritz OA. Pharmacokinetics of maropitant citrate in Rhode Island Red chickens (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) following subcutaneous administration. 2022. *Journal of veterinary pharmacology and therapeutics*.

ALL ABOARD THE NEW ATLANTIC SCOUT

A brand-new dolphin watching boat tour experience launched in partnership with Rover Cruises. The first of its kind on the East Coast, this 70-minute excursion brings guests even closer to wildlife in the new low-riding vessel called the *Atlantic Scout*.



A NEW LOOK AT RAYS

A new ray feeding experience is available for guests as a behind the scenes tour, inviting guests to help feed the rays, learn about the species, and meet the aquarists who care for these animals daily.



LOOKING AHEAD

CHANGING EXHIBITS

Two new changing exhibits will be offered this year, Amazing Pollinators and Rainforest Adventure, to engage our guests in new hands-on experiences that support our mission.

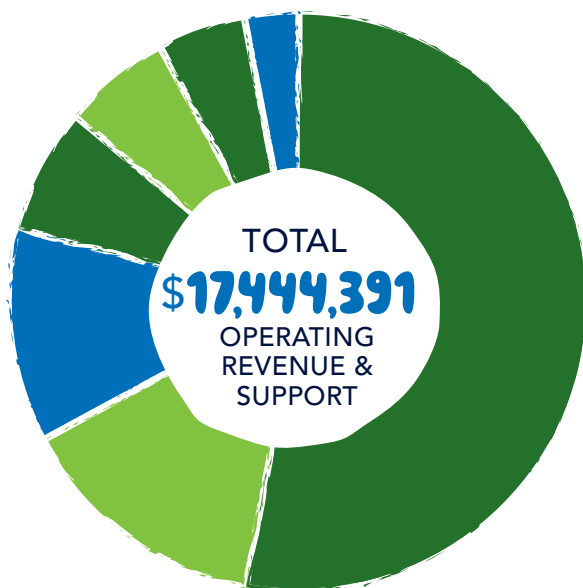
SOUTH BUILDING OPENING

Progress continues to be made at the South Building, and we are working hard towards its anticipated opening. We are eager to invite guests to have fun and learn from the interactive exhibits, touch pools, veterinary care center, water quality lab, kids' play areas, and more.



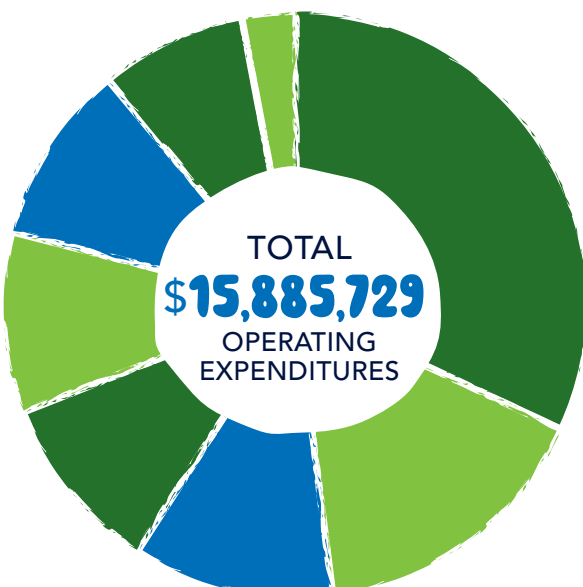
FINANCIALS & STATISTICS

FISCAL YEAR 2023



OPERATING REVENUE & SUPPORT

53%	ADMISSION REVENUE	\$9,222,324	<div><div></div></div>
14%	RETAIL	\$2,472,090	<div><div></div></div>
12%	CONTRIBUTIONS, GRANTS & SUPPORT	\$2,032,522	<div><div></div></div>
7%	MEMBERSHIP	\$1,196,598	<div><div></div></div>
6%	EDUCATION PROGRAMS	\$1,115,056	<div><div></div></div>
5%	FACILITY USE & CONCESSIONS	\$846,291	<div><div></div></div>
3%	INVESTMENT INCOME	\$559,510	<div><div></div></div>



OPERATING EXPENDITURES

32%	EXHIBITS & HUSBANDRY	\$5,093,603	<div><div></div></div>
16%	ADMINISTRATIVE	\$2,575,102	<div><div></div></div>
11%	EDUCATION	\$1,801,958	<div><div></div></div>
10%	GUEST & MEMBER SERVICES	\$1,646,610	<div><div></div></div>
10%	RESEARCH & CONSERVATION	\$1,570,840	<div><div></div></div>
10%	MERCHANDISING	\$1,516,482	<div><div></div></div>
8%	MARKETING	\$1,238,380	<div><div></div></div>
3%	FUNDRAISING	\$442,754	<div><div></div></div>

NET CITY \$445,104 | NET FOUNDATION \$1,558,662

All net city revenues are returned to the City of Virginia Beach General Fund. As the Foundation is responsible for the animals and exhibits at the Aquarium, Foundation net revenues will be invested in new and advanced exhibits as well as the upkeep and maintenance of existing exhibits and their infrastructure.

592,578

GUEST ATTENDANCE

July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

7,831

MEMBERSHIPS SOLD

Including New Members & Renewals

1,281

VIRGINIA AQUARIUM FUND DONORS



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

VIRGINIA AQUARIUM & MARINE SCIENCE CENTER FOUNDATION

July 2022 – June 2023

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Past Officer

Daniel R. Peterson
Treasurer

Buffy J. Barefoot

Barbara Ciara

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Mark Dreyfus

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Stephen M. Snyder

Andrew W. Vakos

Walter D. Worrall (Dave)



Remembering
Robert H. DeFord, Jr.
Virginia Aquarium & Marine
Science Center Foundation
Board of Trustee Member
1981-2013; President 1983-1984

WELCOME NEW TRUSTEES



Michelle Collins

Emily J. MacCartney

Walter D. Worrall (Dave)

MAKE A SPLASH WITH US

The future is swimming with exciting plans for the Virginia Aquarium! Your support propels our mission forward in incredible ways. Dive into smarter giving by exploring tax-smart options like donating from your IRA or Donor-Advised Fund, or making a gift of cryptocurrency or appreciated stock. Scan the QR code to make a wave of difference for our animals and the future of ocean conservation.



THANK YOU

To our numerous donors & sponsors who helped us to further our mission. Your continued support benefits our community in more ways than one.

For a complete list of the Honor Roll of Donors, or to make a gift of your own, visit VirginiaAquarium.com. Gifts can also be made by using the envelope enclosed.



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Funding from the sale of the Protect Sea Life plate supports the programs and operations of the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center and its mission of marine conservation.



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