



# BENEATH THE *Surface*

VIRGINIA AQUARIUM  
FISCAL YEAR 2022  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
JULY 1, 2021 – JUNE 30, 2022



The mission of the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center is to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research, and sustainable practices.

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, supports the work of the Virginia Aquarium. The Foundation procures and maintains the Aquarium's exhibits, including the animals and habitats. It is also responsible for annual and capital fundraising, administration and funding for the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program, conservation and scientific research efforts, and the Aquarium's mission-related education programs. You can be a part of our mission: make a tax-deductible donation to support our incredible programming.

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DEAR Friends,



Our many successes are evident when you walk through our doors at the Virginia Aquarium or visit us online. Yet, our efforts have fostered so many more achievements that may go unnoticed; and these efforts have profoundly meaningful impacts on our mission. We challenge you to look beneath the surface to see the amazing work we are undertaking each day to conserve the environment and inspire others to act. In this way, we can ensure the survival of the ocean's treasures and share them with future generations.

“WE CHALLENGE YOU TO LOOK BENEATH THE SURFACE...”

During the past year, we celebrated the successful birth of two spotted eagle ray pups with the world. Threatened in the wild, with near-endangered populations, our commitment to the survival of the spotted eagle ray species culminated in the birth of these two pups. Additionally, our guests are now able to enjoy the juvenile Komodo dragons on exhibit for the first time. These mysterious creatures, born six years ago, went on public exhibit this past year as they grow out of their adolescent inclination to climb. The Virginia Aquarium participates with other zoos and aquariums worldwide, ensuring the survival and genetic diversity of endangered species.

Moreover, our important conservation work continues with our Stranding Response Program. During the past fiscal year, we responded to a record number of hooked sea turtles and stranded dolphins. Our work begins when we receive a call about an injured or stranded animal. Whether it is through the rehabilitation or examination of a deceased animal, we are learning and affecting change for the survival of these endangered animals.

For the first time since 2019, we were able to welcome back school groups, and our virtual educational offering expanded throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, reaching even more students than in pre-COVID years.

Our work this past year shows the breadth of what we can accomplish when we work together, from our interactions with over 600,000 guests to our important work worldwide on conservation initiatives. We are grateful for your actions and continued support. Thank you for helping us during the past year. We challenge you to continue to dive beneath the surface to learn more about what we do and how you can help.

*Cynthia W. Spanoulis*  
Cynthia W. Spanoulis  
Executive Director

*Salvatore J. DaBiero*  
Salvatore J. DaBiero  
Chair of the Board



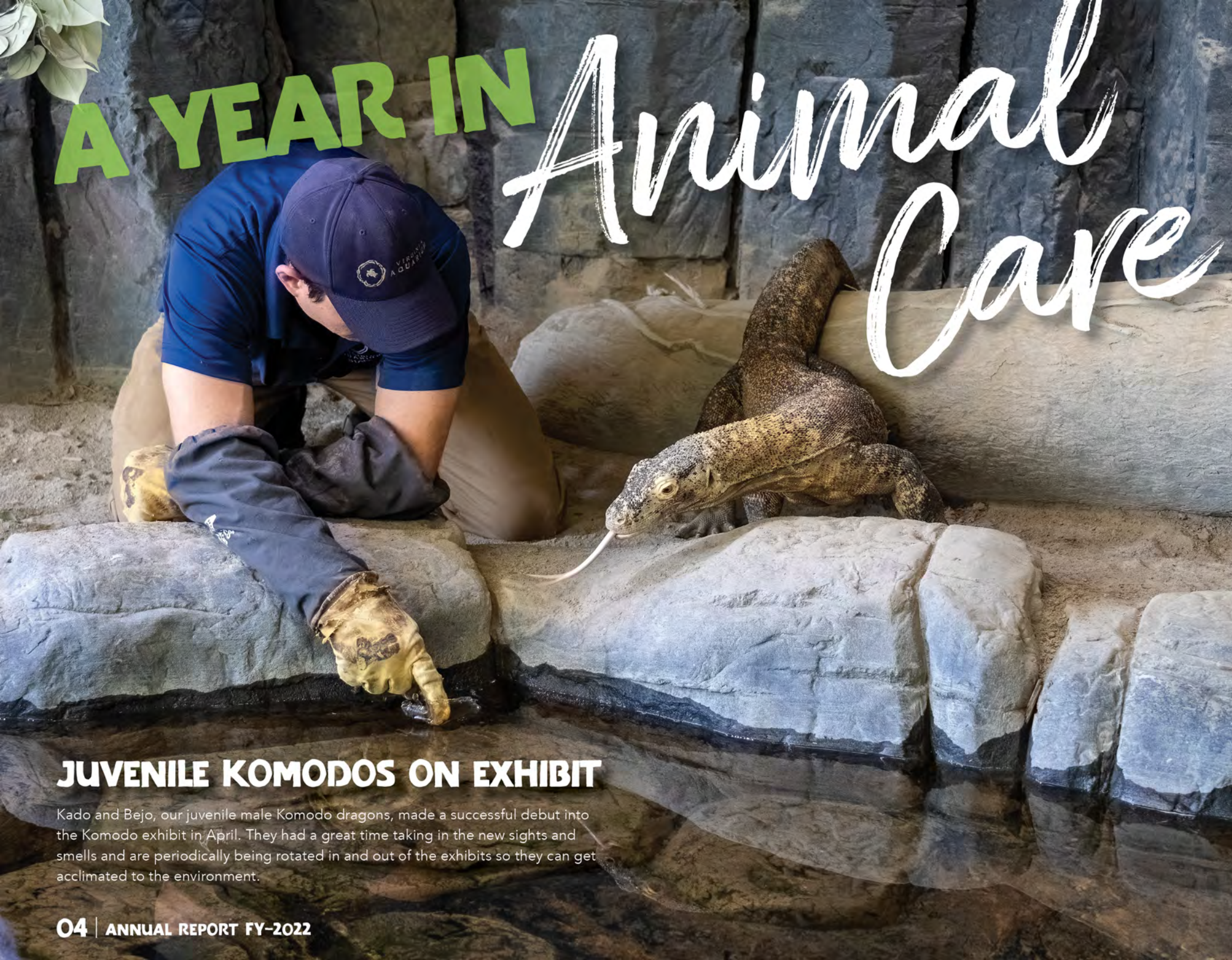


# CONSERVATION GETS NEW *Spots*

Our spotted eagle ray Sadana gave birth to two female pups on Wednesday, January 26, 2022, marking a significant milestone for the Virginia Aquarium and for zoos and aquariums worldwide. Spotted eagle ray reproduction is exceedingly rare, and the typical gestation period can be from six to 13 months. Spotted eagle rays are listed as Near Threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and are included in a Species Survival Plan (SSP) through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

Newborn spotted eagle rays do not require parental care and are self-sufficient at birth. The pups spent time in an off-exhibit area while staff closely monitored their diets, behaviors, and welfare. Our veterinary and animal care teams provided the pups with additional nutritional support as they got better at eating independently. The pups reached a mature age to be introduced to a new environment, and they were transported to a fellow AZA-accredited facility in September.





# A YEAR IN *Animal Cave*

## JUVENILE KOMODOS ON EXHIBIT

Kado and Bejo, our juvenile male Komodo dragons, made a successful debut into the Komodo exhibit in April. They had a great time taking in the new sights and smells and are periodically being rotated in and out of the exhibits so they can get acclimated to the environment.



## CELEBRATING WITH ENRICHMENT

Enrichment gives animals a creative channel for physical activity and mental exercise, and allows for choice and control over how they spend their time. Enrichment keeps an animal's day interesting and is just as essential to animal welfare as nutrition and veterinary care.

Our animals took part in a number of sights, sounds, tastes, and smells, including pumpkins for the spooky season, gift boxes for Christmas, a menorah of treats for Hanukkah, rainbow ice for PRIDE month, special birthday "cakes," Easter eggs, and so much more!

## TOMISTOMA EGGS

In May, our female Tomistoma laid 19 eggs. This crocodilian species is at risk of extinction, so the prospect of these eggs marks a milestone for our Aquarium and the Tomistoma Species Survival Plan (SSP). Our husbandry team excavated the eggs and transferred them to incubators in hopes of a higher hatching success rate.

## NEW ANIMALS

We welcomed three new animal residents this past fiscal year. Along with Javier, the Harbor seal joining our seal exhibit, Sparkles, the Flemish Giant Rabbit, and Godzilla, the Prehensile skink joined our Animal Ambassador program.







# AQUARIUM *Updates*

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF THE VIRGINIA AQUARIUM



We are committed to evolving and expanding our facility's exhibitions and infrastructure to reinvigorate the guest experience and ensure spaces are safe for our animals to inhabit.

Our South Building opened in 1995 and was closed in 2018 for a planned \$23.4 million renovation to revamp the entire facility. Funding for the project included \$14.9 million from the City of Virginia Beach, while the remaining \$8.5 million was provided by the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation. The construction process has experienced recurring delays, but exciting exhibit details are coming together, and progress continues. Much of the planned renovations have been completed, with many exhibit spaces ready for water to be pumped in and processed. Upgrades include a new café and store, new play areas for children, two new animal exhibit galleries, and new labs and clinics where guests can observe daily staff activities.

While the building is not yet open to the public, our Water Quality team officially moved to the South Building to begin utilizing the fully functional water quality lab in February 2022. This new lab has four times the space, two sinks, the ability to sterilize two times more equipment, and a new autoanalyzer for ease and efficiency.

Our aging harbor seal exhibit had significant structural issues this past year. The exhibit opened to the public in 1996, and we last conducted routine maintenance in 2018. The upgrades included replacing the caulk, grinding off and repainting the pool waterproofing, and polishing the acrylic. The \$125,000 construction project was funded by the Virginia Aquarium Foundation, and took place from mid-June to late August. During this time, the seals moved to a temporary habitat behind the scenes where staff could maintain their daily routine.

Our ray touch pool was built in 1998 and underwent a \$127,380 revitalization process to add new vinyl flooring around the exhibit, improve the pool floor, and upgrade the decking and railing that overlooks the pool. The updates included funds from the Foundation totaling \$15,600. Most of the rays in this exhibit can be seen elsewhere in the Aquarium, including the Light Tower exhibit with the sea turtles or in the Chesapeake Bay Aquarium.

During the past year, the Virginia Aquarium has partnered with Canapy and Roto Design to provide strategic, business, and master planning for the Virginia Aquarium. This work will provide a roadmap with a compelling mission, strategic goals, and overall physical plans for the next ten years for the staff, board, and the City to align priorities. These plans should be complete by December 2022 and provide a compelling case for support from all stakeholders.

## BEHIND-THE-SCENES TOURS ARE BACK

This year, for the first time since the COVID pandemic began, the Aquarium team reintroduced our Behind-the-Scenes tours for guests, welcoming visitors into our back-of-house areas to get a closer look at how we care for our animals and maintain their habitats. We now offer four tour options: sea turtles in our Light Tower Aquarium, sharks in the Norfolk Canyon exhibit, Komodo dragons in the Restless Planet, and an in-depth look at our life support systems behind the Chesapeake Bay Aquarium.

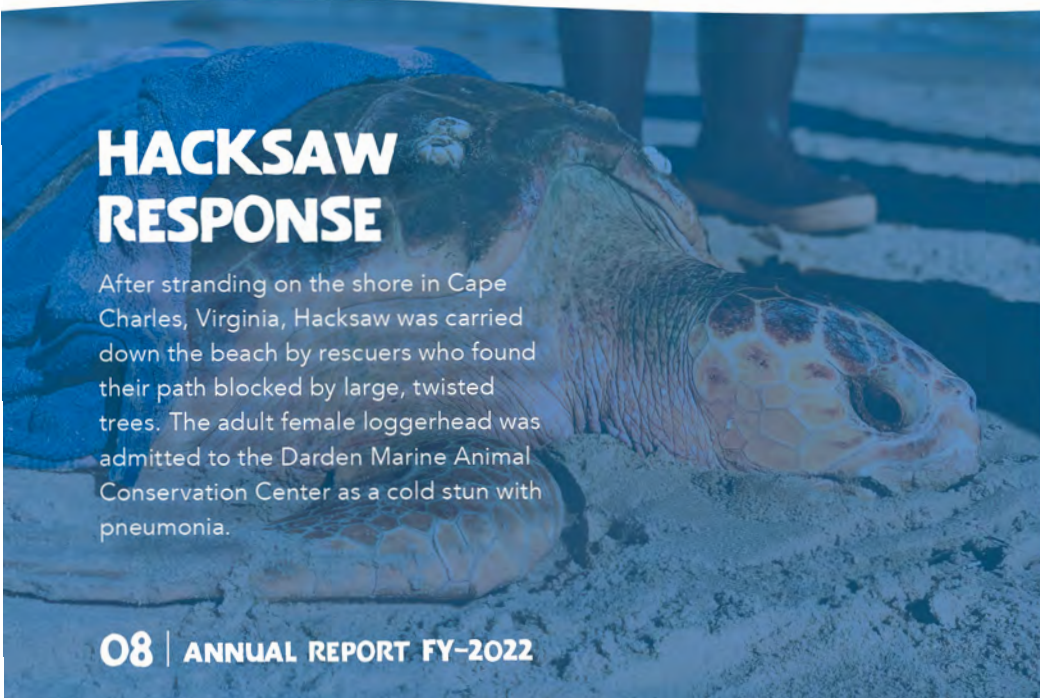




# A YEAR IN Stranding

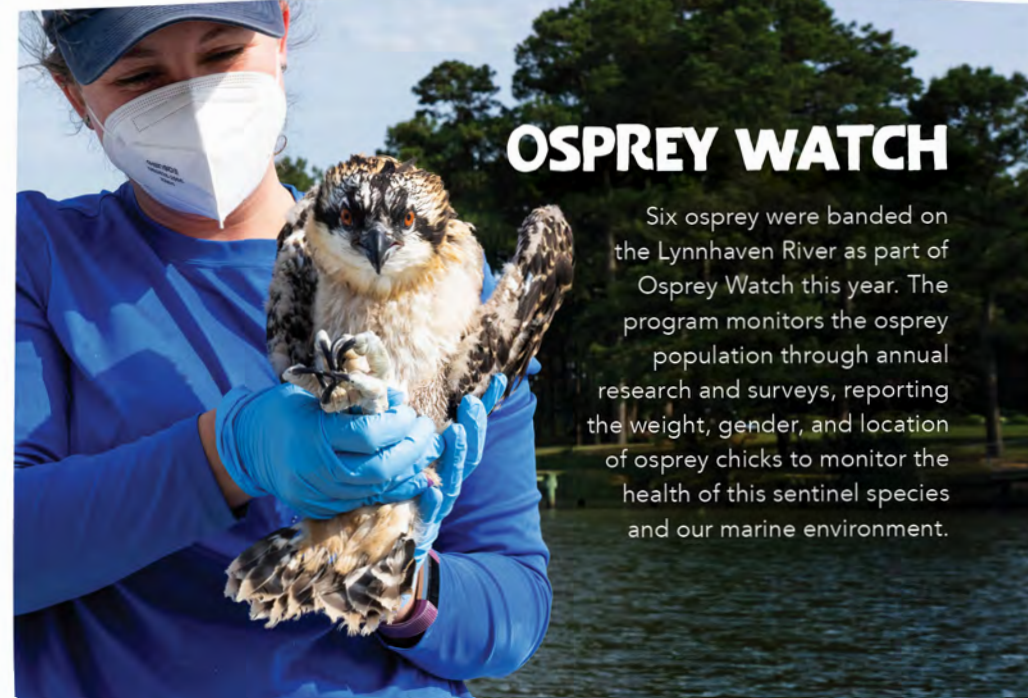
## RECORD-BREAKING HOOKING SEASON

2022 was a record-breaking year with the most hooked sea turtle responses in the history of the Stranding Response Program. We reported 65 hooked turtles from April 30 to August 17, and dozens of turtle patients required rehabilitation at the Darden Marine Animal Conservation Center (DMACC).



## HACKSAW RESPONSE

After stranding on the shore in Cape Charles, Virginia, Hacksaw was carried down the beach by rescuers who found their path blocked by large, twisted trees. The adult female loggerhead was admitted to the Darden Marine Animal Conservation Center as a cold stun with pneumonia.



## OSPREY WATCH

Six osprey were banded on the Lynnhaven River as part of Osprey Watch this year. The program monitors the osprey population through annual research and surveys, reporting the weight, gender, and location of osprey chicks to monitor the health of this sentinel species and our marine environment.

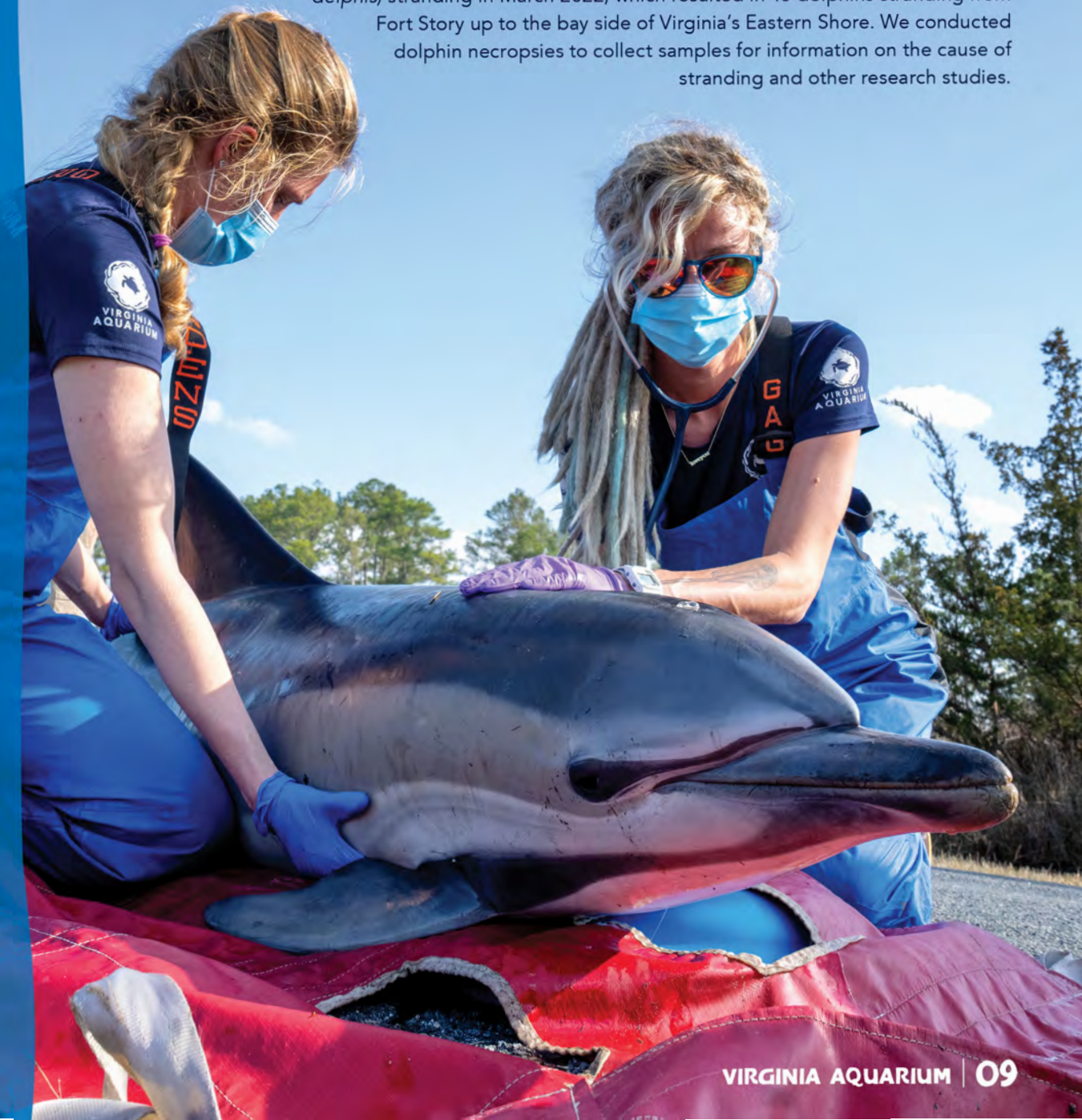
**113**  
**MARINE  
MAMMAL**  
STRANDING RESPONSES

**156**  
**SEA TURTLE**  
STRANDING RESPONSES

**45**  
**SEA TURTLES**  
REHABILITATED  
& RELEASED

## DOLPHIN MASS STRANDING EVENT

The Stranding Response Team responded to a mass common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) stranding in March 2022, which resulted in 15 dolphins stranding from Fort Story up to the bay side of Virginia's Eastern Shore. We conducted dolphin necropsies to collect samples for information on the cause of stranding and other research studies.





# COMMUNITY & Events

## NIGHT AT THE AQUARIUM

The Virginia Aquarium's annual Night at the Aquarium fundraising event raised more than \$143,000 last year through event sponsorships and auction proceeds, netting approximately \$113,000 after expenses. The net exceeds the Aquarium's prior record of \$105,000, which occurred amid the pandemic in 2020. Sponsored by Capital Group, the online auction took place August 16-28, 2021 and featured Aquarium and local attraction experiences, artwork, one-of-a-kind items, exotic travel opportunities, and more!

Over 400 supporters registered to participate in the virtual auction, placing 732 bids on approximately 100 items. The online auction allowed the annual event to reach a vastly broader audience this year, with supporters participating from Pennsylvania to Wisconsin, all the way to California.

## FINS & FRIGHTS

Our devilishly fun Halloween experience drew in plenty of guests wearing their costume best during two nights of spooktacular treats and haunting journeys through our exhibits. Sponsored by East Coast Appliance.

## HOLI-RAYS

We transformed the Aquarium into a merry and bright winter wonderland for six nights in December, featuring Fish-mas trees, dreidel by the menorah-octopus, scuba Santa, sustainable crafts, and more. Sponsored by East Coast Appliance.

## FANTASEAS

Our fantastically decorated exhibits hosted mermaids, pirates, wizards, and fairies for an enchanted evening for our visitors in April. Sponsored by East Coast Appliance.

## EGGSTRAVAGANZA

We collaborated with Kinder Joy® for family festivities to ring in the spring, with treats and toys, egg hunts, egg crafts, and trivia with prizes.



## WHY SHARKS MATTER

The Eleanor and Henry Watts Conservation Speaker Series was paused due to the COVID pandemic. This special lecture series was finally reintroduced in 2021 with marine biologist and elasmobranch researcher Jasmine Graham, who presented a lecture on Shark and Ray Awareness Day on July 14, 2021.

## SHARKS AFTER DARK

This monthly after-hours experience gave guests 21 years old and up the chance to enjoy our animals without large crowds or high-energy kiddos (but plus the adult-friendly drinks!)

## THIRD ANNUAL TURTLE TROT

We celebrated World Sea Turtle Day and our 36th anniversary in June with our third annual virtual 5K, where proceeds supported the Virginia Aquarium Foundation. This year, participants enjoyed a finish line gathering at Smartmouth Brewing to meet and greet with our mascots and learn more about the Virginia Aquarium Foundation and the various conservation and education initiatives it supports. This year's Turtle Trot raised \$8,338.68 in support for the Foundation.

## SENSORY FRIENDLY MORNINGS

Every second Saturday of the month, we provided an early opening exclusively for guests and families wanting an aquarium visit that offered softer lighting, limited sound, and other comfortable sensory modifications.

## E-CYCLING RETURNS

Our E-cycling Event returned in 2022! This year, our team collected 16,700 lbs. of electronics and 8,100 lbs. of hazardous household waste for safe disposal, as well as 120 lbs. of recyclables like cardboard.

## GOLF CLASSIC

This special fundraiser brought golfers and golf teams out for a day on the green to support the Virginia Aquarium Foundation, grossing \$97,897.12 in funding for animal care, education programs, research, and conservation activities. Sponsored by Atlantic Union Bank.

## LOVE BITES

A new event for Valentine's season, we gave the broken-hearted the chance to buy a feeder rat, fish, cricket, or worm and name them after an ex before we filmed each one disappearing into the hungry jaws of our animals! The event produced \$1,232 for the Virginia Aquarium Foundation and sold out in under 24 hours!



# 6,700

## PARTICIPANTS REACHED

IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL

# 109

## SCHOOL PROGRAMS

ON-SITE CLASSES & OUTREACH

# 104

## VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

OFFERED



### SEASONAL CAMPS

Camps returned in summer 2021 with COVID modifications but were well received by participants. In June 2022, we increased capacity limits and expanded hands-on activities.

### WELCOMING BACK SCHOOL GROUPS

In winter 2022, school groups returned to the Aquarium while we continued reaching students virtually. Grants also supported virtual programming for underserved schools.

# YOUTH Programs



### WATERSHED WARRIORS

Our enthusiastic guides demonstrated interactive science activities on the Nature Trail and the Owls Creek Garden and Deck throughout the summer.

### STEAM TEAM

This grant-funded program helped determine the positive impact that youth educator programs have on the docents and our visitors.

### EXPANDED TODDLER PROGRAMS

In addition to continuing our Virtual Toddler Tuesday program, we introduced Virtual Toddler Treks through the Nature Trail and our Discovery Garden outdoor activities. Sponsored by Bob and Leslie Fort.



### YOUTH CONSERVATION SERIES

In our Youth Conservation Summit, students ages 12-18 learned how to address conservation issues and explored marine science careers in our virtual Career Day.





## CHARITABLE GRANTS FOR EDUCATION

Generous charitable grants continue to allow the Aquarium to serve its mission and provide innovative education programs to school and youth groups.

PRA Group's gift of \$25,000 provided funds to underwrite virtual and in-person education programs for schools in Norfolk, Hampton, and Danville. During the 2021/22 school year, Aquarium educators conducted programs for approximately 2,433 students.

GEICO Philanthropic Foundation's gift of \$10,000 provided funding for the Aquarium to enhance outreach learning programs with schools and other partner groups.

Trustee Nancy DeFord and her husband Bob, an Emeritus Trustee, gave \$10,000, which provided funds to enhance a new virtual program initiative through subsidizing participation costs for underserved audiences and supporting new program development. Their support also assisted in restarting and refreshing our popular in-person outreach by covering the costs of new supplies and equipment, such as computer tablets.

The Camp Foundation and The Ruth Camp Campbell Foundation's gifts totaling \$10,000 supported outreach education programs. During FY22, Aquarium educators completed 213 programs, serving 6,700 participants. The virtual programs have allowed Aquarium educators to reach a larger group of students across Virginia. For many students, the Aquarium is their first exposure to marine science.



## STAFF News

### MARK SWINGLE ENDOWED FUND

In honor of Mark Swingle's retirement from his position as Chief of Research & Conservation this spring, friends and colleagues came together to create the Mark Swingle Endowed Fund for Research and Conservation to provide an annual distribution to support the operations of the research and conservation division in perpetuity. The Foundation received an overwhelming response with 91 gifts totaling \$107,030, and supporters may continue to give to the endowed fund in Mark's honor.



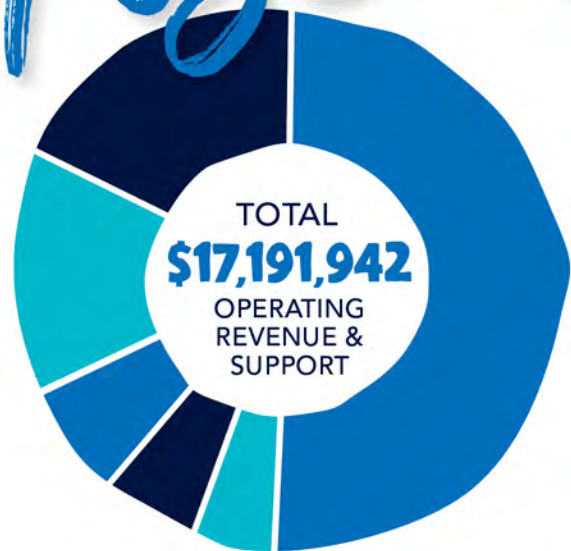
### ACADEMIC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

Staff from the Stranding Response Program were published in a peer-review academic journal: *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, 21 (1): 63-73. *Characterizing Sea Turtle Bycatch in the Recreational Hook and Line Fishery in Southeast Virginia, USA*. This article was co-authored by four current and past staff members and a stranding volunteer: Rose, Sarah A., Bates, Erin B., McNaughton, Allyson N., O'Hara, Kathryn J., and Barco, Susan G.



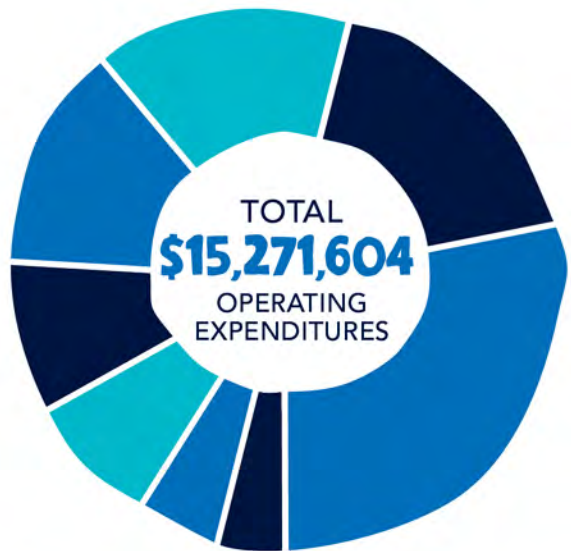


# Fiscal Year 2022 FINANCIALS & STATISTICS



## OPERATING REVENUE & SUPPORT

			CITY	FOUNDATION
<b>53%</b>	ADMISSION REVENUE	<b>\$9,193,690</b>		
<b>19%</b>	CONTRIBUTIONS, GRANTS & SUPPORT	<b>\$3,341,223</b>		
<b>15%</b>	RETAIL	<b>\$2,545,042</b>		
<b>7%</b>	MEMBERSHIP	<b>\$1,130,052</b>		
<b>6%</b>	EDUCATION PROGRAMS	<b>\$990,767</b>		
<b>5%</b>	FACILITY USE & CONCESSIONS	<b>\$910,276</b>		
<b>-5%*</b>	INVESTMENT INCOME	<b>-\$919,108*</b>		
		<small>*UNREALIZED LOSSES</small>		



## OPERATING EXPENDITURES

<b>28%</b>	EXHIBITS & HUSBANDRY	<b>\$4,305,470</b>		
<b>18%</b>	ADMINISTRATIVE	<b>\$2,741,862</b>		
<b>15%</b>	EDUCATION	<b>\$2,277,722</b>		
<b>13%</b>	RESEARCH & CONSERVATION	<b>\$1,937,960</b>		
<b>9%</b>	MERCHANDISING	<b>\$1,440,511</b>		
<b>8%</b>	MARKETING	<b>\$1,242,836</b>		
<b>5%</b>	GUEST & MEMBER SERVICES	<b>\$700,840</b>		
<b>4%</b>	FUNDRAISING	<b>\$624,403</b>		

**NET CITY \$2,022,725 | NET FOUNDATION -\$102,388**

# 610,311

## GUEST ATTENDANCE

JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022

# 7,884

## MEMBERSHIPS SOLD

NEW MEMBERS & RENEWALS

# 1,813

## AQUARIUM FUND DONORS





# BOARD OF Trustees

## VIRGINIA AQUARIUM & MARINE SCIENCE CENTER FOUNDATION

JULY 2021–JUNE 2022

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## Welcome NEW TRUSTEES!



Remembering  
**Thomas Joseph Lyons Jr.**

Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation  
Board of Trustees Member  
**1994-2009**

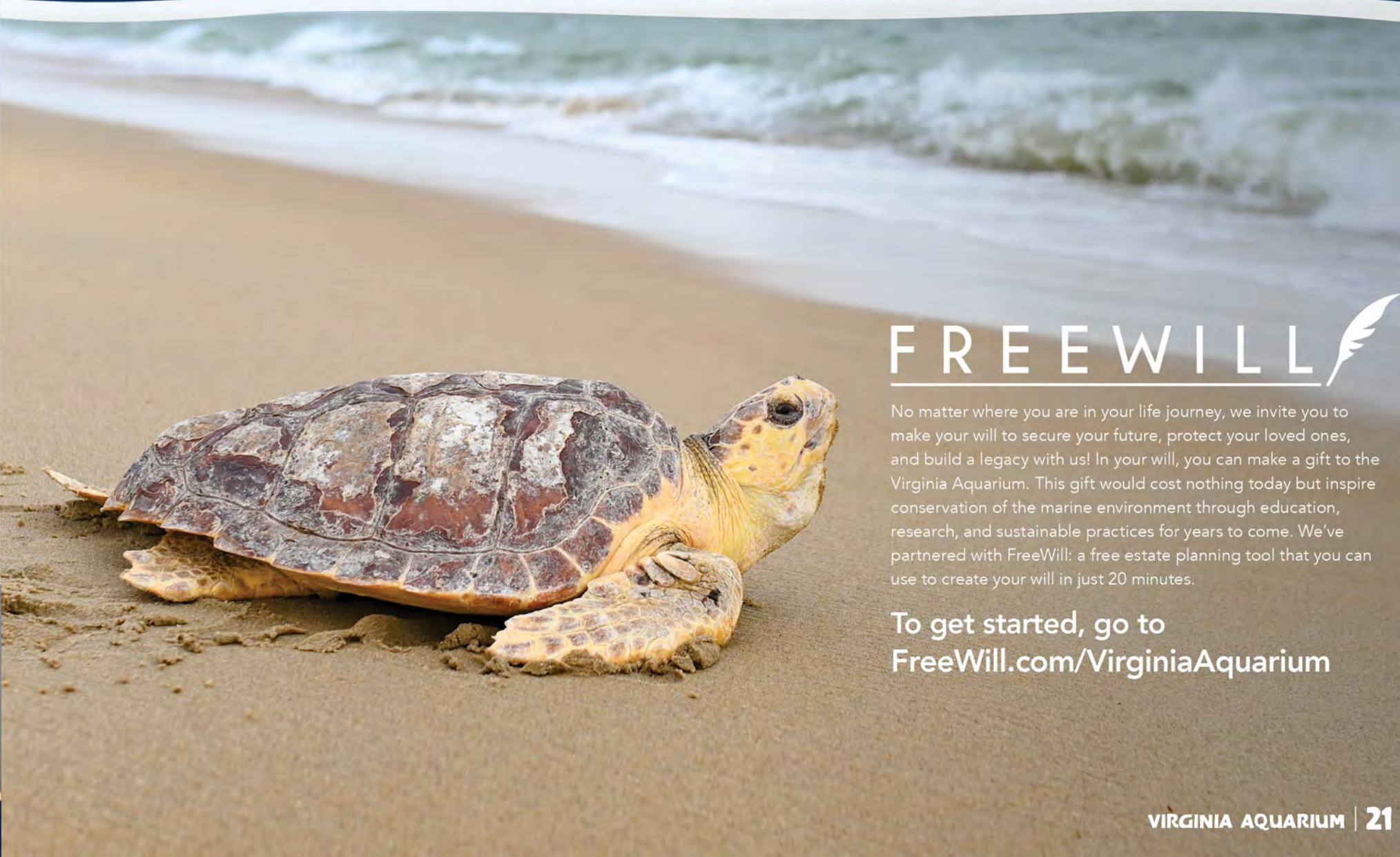


Holley Darden Nancy DeFord Jay G. Kenslow Suzanne Kern

## 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 [www.VirginiaAquarium.com](http://www.VirginiaAquarium.com). Gifts can also be made by using the envelope enclosed.



## FREEWILL

No matter where you are in your life journey, we invite you to make your will to secure your future, protect your loved ones, and build a legacy with us! In your will, you can make a gift to the Virginia Aquarium. This gift would cost nothing today but inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research, and sustainable practices for years to come. We've partnered with FreeWill: a free estate planning tool that you can use to create your will in just 20 minutes.

To get started, go to [FreeWill.com/VirginiaAquarium](http://FreeWill.com/VirginiaAquarium)





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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 to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research, and sustainable practices.



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