OUR MISSION

is to inspire conservation of the natural world by exhibiting and caring for animals, by excelling in education and research and by providing an exceptional visitor experience.
Dear Friends,

There’s a reason sea turtles have been around for at least 260 million years.

They’ve survived asteroid strikes and ice ages, global warming and global cooling, volcanic eruptions and continental drift. Today, they contend with the byproducts of an “Anthropocene era” driven by human activity, from accelerating climate change to habitat encroachment and plastic pollution.

Patients in our Sea Turtle Care Center™ survive against all odds, some drawing as little as one breath per minute, rebounding from broken carapaces and missing flippers, recovering from intestinal blockage due to plastic ingestion and fighting off massive infections.

In a word, they are resilient.

It’s a quality we can all learn and borrow from as we navigate today’s uncertain times. The pandemic required us to adapt in new and novel ways to ensure our own sustainability — resonizing, reorganizing and reprioritizing.

Today, I’m pleased to report that the Aquarium is stronger than ever. Our team of professional staff is fully restored and our caring and compassionate culture is intact. Our business has never been better, and we just enjoyed our best attendance since 2002. And throughout, our unwavering devotion to our mission guides all of our decisions and future plans.

We continue to provide the highest standards of care to all the species under our roof, ensuring that these animals not only survive, but thrive. We inspire learners of all ages through our myriad programs and classroom curriculum. We engage communities across the state in environmental clean-up efforts and citizen science.

Your investment in the Aquarium contributes greatly to our capacity for resilience. Thank you.

In short, the mutual survival of all species.

Yours truly,

Sincerely,

Kevin Mills
President and CEO
South Carolina Aquarium
Hands-On Experiences for High Schoolers

Investing in the next generation is our greatest opportunity to foster a future of conservation and caring. Our High School Intern Program provides paid, hands-on learning experiences for interns, both within our walls and beyond. Along with onsite education opportunities, interns participated in a myriad of research and fieldwork alongside expert staff and outside organizations. They constructed concrete artificial reef balls to dispatch in offshore habitats, built oyster reefs to revitalize a saltmarsh environment, collected and logged vital sea rise data during a king tide walk and spent time counting and tagging horseshoe crab populations during their spawning season. Mutually beneficial opportunities like these empower interns to gather valuable scientific data and to create real world change within our community, while also deepening their passion for conservation and paving the way for future careers in the STEM field.

New Education Leadership Partner Training

Educating South Carolina’s students about the natural world is no small feat, but we’re lucky to have a dedicated school system — brought forth opportunities for collaborative climate action. We facilitated a community meeting to encourage open dialog, hosted a complimentary open access night at the Aquarium and led a data-driven litter sweep for the Maryville community. Additionally, we participated in a unique project spearheaded by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to hand-excavate a channel for water to reenter and breathe life back into their local saltmarsh. Alongside numerous partners, we reallocated 15,000 gallons of pluff mud, laid recycled oyster shells along the banks of the new channel and planted additional saltmarsh grasses to stabilize and strengthen the budding habitat.

A Visit from Dr. Sylvia Earle

Celebrating women in science was the central focus for our annual Conservation Gala, where we also honored a special guest with the Lifetime Achievement Award: world-renowned oceanographer and explorer Dr. Sylvia Earle. With decades of experience in exploring and interpreting science and conservation to the general public, it was particularly poignant to have living legend Dr. Earle present. After a daytime visit to see the lifesaving efforts of our Sea Turtle Care Center™, Dr. Earle gave a keynote that evening, reiterating the importance of what we strive to do daily at the Aquarium: inspire care for and dedication to the natural world. In Dr. Earle’s words, “We are as dependent on the ocean as the sea — to participate in a two-week workshop, where they worked alongside our own staff to gain critical insight on how to carry our mission into their own regions. Revitalizing and expanding this core group of ELPs increases our reach throughout the state, thus opening doors for curious young minds wanting to learn about the natural world.

Good Catch Relaunch

Encouraging communities to support local, sustainable seafood practices and consumption of responsibly harvested seafood is the foundation of the Aquarium. The relaunch of this program positioned us once again to uplift restaurants, purveyors, retailers and caterers who serve local options and educate conscientious consumers who want to choose wisely. With an added priority of making seafood more accessible, we piloted Good Catch Seafood Connection, a collaborative effort that provides free, local and sustainably harvested seafood to food-insecure neighbors throughout the Lowcountry. Interweaving community partners — Cherry Point Seafood, the Culinary Institute of Charleston at Trident Technical College, Lowcountry Food Bank and One80 Place — with unique expertise and resources, Seafood Connection is projected to serve 5,000 meals annually, support local fishermen, keep local seafood truly local and enable community members to gain critical skills to build their future through the lens of local seafood.

Saltmarsh Channel Excavation

Learning about climate impacts firsthand from communities on the frontlines — like those living in the historic Maryville community — in the form of Educators Leadership Program (ELP) trainings. ELPs serve as liaisons to the Aquarium and help us keep our curriculum up-to-date, lead teacher workshops for our programs and Energy Schools. Ten educators joined aquarium staff, mounting the mountains to the sea — to participate in a two-week workshop, where they worked alongside our own staff to gain critical insight on how to carry our mission into their own regions. Revitalizing and expanding this core group of ELPs increases our reach throughout the state, thus opening doors for curious young minds wanting to learn about the natural world.

Blue Mind Moments

Serving as a safe haven from the hustle, stress, overstimulation and demands of the outside world may not be what you’d typically consider of an aquarium. However, studies show that proximity to water can lower anxiety and stress levels, bolster feelings of happiness and calm and inspire creativity and understanding of the world and of those around us, known as “blue mind.” Using this term, coined by marine biologist and author Wallace J. Nichols, we created a framework to foster blue mind moments throughout the Aquarium. We trained staff on mental first aid assistance and produced daily blue mind programming to educate guests on the concept. Thanks to BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina, we added blue chards to the second-floor deck for guests to pause and take in a serene view of the Charleston Harbor. We also hosted a self-care workshop for mental health practitioners and served as a location for ongoing healing opportunities for patients. Through these efforts, we aim to be a beacon of peace and calm in our community.

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Sea Turtle Video for Pediatric Patients

Staying at a hospital can make anyone nervous, but sometimes seeing another go through a similar journey can alleviate a bit of the fear of the unknown. Children being treated at pediatric hospitals across the state show tremendous strength through checkups and treatments. Coupled with our telepresence robot that patients can take turns “driving” throughout the exhibits, the wonder of our Aquarium can be within reach — regardless of where these patients reside.

Membership Pass Expansion

Offering opportunities for community members to visit the Aquarium is as simple as checking out a book from a local library or resource center. This effort initially began as a partnership with the Charleston County Library System that expanded to neighboring Berkeley County Library System and Dorchester County Library. We’ve renewed each county’s respective partnership as well as increased the number of Aquarium membership passes available at each location and have enabled 4,722 patrons to visit the Aquarium. After seeing the impact of this effort in library systems, we expanded to provide six membership passes to the 628th Force Support Squadron’s Family Readiness Center at Joint Base Charleston, so families of deployed service members have the opportunity to experience the wonder of water, wildlife and wild places as they await a beloved family member’s safe return back home.

Additional Language Resources

Ensuring that our guests feel welcomed, understood and that they have the opportunity to learn throughout their visit meant addressing common communication barriers that hinder visitation, particularly for our Spanish-speaking guests. To foster a culture of inclusivity, we made significant strides in expanding our communications in other languages. To help with initial visitation, we updated our Spanish-language exhibit guides and added Spanish recordings to daily announcements within the Aquarium as well as updated our website to include Spanish-language exhibit guides for guests to browse before, during or after their visit. Additionally, staff now don buttons if they understand, speak or are learning another language so that they can interact with guests who may prefer to communicate in languages other than English.

Mountain Forest Fortification

Safeguarding the animals that call the Aquarium home requires routine upkeep and renovating to their habitats. For the Mountain Forest, that meant replacing the mesh that encloses the space to allow both guests and animals to have an open-air experience while ensuring the habitat is protected from wild animals, foreign objects or debris for years to come. During the six-month renovation, resident fish were relocated to behind-the-scenes tanks. The revered river otter pair, Charlie and Beau, continued in receiving top-notch care in the indoor portion of their habitat, which boasted plenty of space to explore, play and rest. We provided them with all of the exercise, enrichment and socialization needed to maintain a healthy wellbeing. And of course, when safe to do so, they spent time in their outdoor habitat during the renovation as well.

Howlite’s Innovative Weighted Jacket

Combining ingenuity, teamwork and collaboration among partner organizations, Howlite’s journey continued despite an unforeseen diagnosis at the start. Initially admitted in July 2021, this sea turtle had a buoyancy disorder caused by a boat strike wound to her/his carapace (top shell), hindering Howlite from naturally diving and from being released back into the wild. During Howlite’s stay, a crafty and creative team of caretakers came up with a solution for this turtle’s buoyancy issues: a custom weighted jacket to maintain balance while swimming. Using neoprene and dive weights, the jacket was fitted specifically for Howlite’s body shape and size, and included strategically placed pockets for weight to be added or removed to balance this loggerhead’s buoyant backend. After a few iterations of this custom-made jacket, Howlite was transported to a long-term home at the Children’s Aquarium in Dallas, Texas, where guests have already been inspired by this resilient sea turtle’s story.

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New Animals Around the Aquarium

Spotlighting animals found in our backyards, along the beaches and beyond the shore means we routinely access the species in our care. While our guests may initially be drawn to the more charismatic creatures (like sea turtles, sharks and river otters), we aimed to highlight the lesser-known — but equally as important — animals that populate our ecosystem. After all, each animal plays a role in the overall dynamic of an ecosystem. After all, each animal plays a pivotal role within their respective habitats. We provided them with all of the exercise, enrichment and socialization needed to maintain a healthy wellbeing. And of course, when safe to do so, they spent time in their outdoor habitat during the renovation as well.

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THANK YOU

The Aquarium is more than an attraction; we are a source of wonder, education, conservation, mental reprieve and responsible stewardship for the natural world — and we have you to thank for that. It’s due to the steadfast support of our donors that we care for sick and injured sea turtles, provide education programming for students and continue our critical conservation work within our walls and beyond. Thank you for joining us on this journey toward a bright, resilient future for generations to come. Your indelible passion and commitment to our mission is what carries us forward each and every day.
Colbert Family Fund of Coastal Cedarhurst Foundation
Carolina One Real Estate
Anonymous (4)
PNC Foundation
Susan and John Neely
Institute of Museum and Library Services
Valerie and Scott Howell
The Oliver S. and Jennie R. Donaldson Charleston County Recreation and Tourism
Aflac
Mary and Peter Conway
Cheryl and Thomas Boswell
$50,000–$99,999
Catherine and Hilton Smith, Jr.*
Ingrid Johnson and Gary Bunton
Ingrid Johnson and Gary Bunton
Hearst Foundations
Charleston Coffee Roasters
$100,000–$249,999
The Spaulding-Paolozzi Foundation
Maureen and Don Glass
Recreation and Tourism
$5,000–$9,999
Jonathan M. Zucker*
ZooKeeper
Kathleen and Tom Wright
Andi L. Volpe*
Joseph J. Schott Foundation
Alexandra S. Samra
Nexans High Voltage USA

$500,000+
Mary Ann and John Danahy
Corona USA
Pebby and Donald Combee, Jr.*
Mark and Judy Buono
Community Foundation of Coastal South Carolina

$5,000–$9,999
Ingrid Johnson and Gary Bunton
Fran and Dennis Nolan
Nexans High Voltage USA

$50,000–$99,999
Mary and Peter Conway
The Samuelle Freeman Foundation
Gary McQueen
Memory of Addison Bunge
Dr. and Mrs. Olde Smith
Confederate Institution

$25,000–$49,999
Atchison
Benjamin and Ginger Kean
A.J. Fikri
Community Foundation of Coastal South Carolina

$50,000–$99,999
Midlands Foundation

$25,000–$49,999
Atchison
Flora and Michael P. Geddes
Community Foundation of Coastal South Carolina

$50,000–$99,999
Midlands Foundation

$25,000–$49,999
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$25,000–$49,999
Atchison
Edward and Gillian Jordan
Community Foundation of Coastal South Carolina

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Midlands Foundation
Dana and Vincent McCarthy
Edie and David May
Dr. Tonya M. Matthews
Oliver Mathewes and Holly Hardy
Corinne and Terry Marthaler
Terry and David Lupo
Lisa and Shawn Livingston
The Liro-Hill Family
Joanne Lingerfelt
Christie Lewis
Elizabeth Leighton and David L. Katcoff
Matthew and Terri Largent
Allison Lang
Mary Lynn and Joshua Kohl
Chad and Laura Kivett
Catherine Kinder
Anne and Will Snelgrove
Claire and Eric Smith
Jane and Robert Sandel, Ed.D.
Bonnie Ryan
Ginny and Jeff Runge
Rose Rowland
Amber Roos
Alice Riva
Bené and Charles Rittenberg
Carolyn Riley
The Radcliffe Fund
Kathryn and Russell Pickett
Alyssa and Robert Phillips
Patricia and Zeke Petryszyn
Brenda and James Orcutt, M.D.
Patty and Harry Olsen
Soho and Bruce Olsen
Melinda and W. Andy Gowder, Jr.
Laura and Rick Glanz
Jean and David Ginn
Donna Forsythe
Jennifer and David Firestone
A. Lynn Fee
Don Doyle and Marjorie Spruill
Lisa and James Donofrio
Carly and Tom Westerman
Rachel and Robert Wehrman
Jerry Walton
The Vane Family
Ellett Toomey
Elizabeth and Hugh Tappan
Anne and Will Snelgrove
Maiya Buscaglia
Grant Burdine
Benjamin Burdette
Katielyn Bunting
Paul Buhler
Frances Bryan
Anna Ewing
Zachery Evans
Kathryn Jeppesen
Katherine Johns
Joyce Nettleton
Kelly McKean
Linda Hollander
Victoria Hoagland
Michael Komar
Jeff Housen
* Charter Member
* Deceased
Edie and David May
The PikeAmp Family
Dana and Vincent McCarthy
Dave and Donald Mccarthy
Paula Mcgregor
Joseph T. McPherson +
Pam and Mark Meeks
Kermit Mercur and Heidi Fokky
Shirley and Michael Mds
Christopher and Lisa Mms
West and Wendy Holley
Joseph Phelan
David Moore
Lisa and James Gordon
Don and Marie Spraul
A Lynn Comer
Jennifer and David Findon
Donna Fontaine
Ivy and David French, M.D.
Jean Gordon +
Jean and Carol +
Sally and John +
Kelley and Mark +
Joan and Brian +
Kathy Anderl
Pam and Roger Anderl
Carol Onderl
Monti Telpner
Katie Tener
Charlie Hendar
The Watershed Society is a passionate group of philanthropists who support the South Carolina Aquarium annually at a level that propels the organization forward and who receive focused programming throughout the year.

Sometimes, big impacts can arise from small acts of support. Such an instance occurred when a spirited child named Luke Jennings decided to turn his musical talent into a tactile fundraiser to support the Aquarium during the pandemic. At just 10 years old, Jennings began drumming outside his home, ultimately raising $2,500 for the Aquarium from his efforts and bringing awareness to our mission. His heartfelt dedication not only inspired his parents to become members of our Watershed Society, but served as an ongoing reminder that anyone can create a wave of change for the natural world.

Learn more about joining our closest circle of supporters at scaquarium.org/giving-societies

**SUPPORTS AND REVENUE**
- Admissions $9,983,166
- Memberships $1,776,688
- Contributions $5,826,012
- Concessions $1,016,590
- Other Income $1,260,560
- Programs and Events $1,145,132
  - Supplemental $203,295
  - Fundraising Events $192,316
  - Program Revenues $97,471
- Total Revenue $21,501,230

**EXPENSES**
- Program Services
  - Facilities $2,983,598
  - Guest Programs $3,633,250
  - Animal Care $2,418,828
  - Education $1,652,153
  - Conservation $958,953
  - Memberships $593,953
- Supporting Services
  - Management and General $2,734,666
  - Annual Campaign and Fundraising $1,448,311
  - Membership Development $99,503
- Total Expenses $16,523,215

74% applied directly to education, conservation and animal care
The year ahead holds the promise of many new beginnings, the first of which is the culmination of a project designed to enrich and improve the work of our South Carolina Aquarium team. For much of 2023, many of our staff worked remotely as we initiated the most comprehensive office renovation in our nearly 25-year history. Now, staff have reentered this treasured facility, occupying state-of-the-art workspaces that will enable us to more efficiently serve our guests and community, and reconnect with one another.

Amidst the months-long office renovation, we began working closely with world-class master planning consultants to craft a vision for the future of our facility. The year ahead will set our strategic leadership team on a path to realizing this vision as we prioritize innovative new experiences, exhibits and even new animals that will refresh the guest journey in unexpected ways.

By this year’s close, we will celebrate the opening of the Boeing Learning Lab at the Charleston Maritime Center, initiating the arrival of the Aquarium as a waterfront campus and animating Charleston’s cultural corridor on the eastern peninsula. We will welcome our first classes to the Boeing Learning Lab in 2025, nearly doubling the number of K–12 students served through Dominion Energy School Programs. A growing slate of teen programming and Lifelong Learning events will also bring this facility to life throughout the year.

All of these transformational moments will pave the way to a 25th anniversary celebration in 2025 of which you, as our community of supporters and believers, will be a central part. The horizon grows ever brighter thanks to your commitment to the work of our Aquarium, and we thank you for joining us on this remarkable journey.