



NORTH · CAROLINA  
AQUARIUMS

ANNUAL REVIEW 2015

# A LETTER TO OUR SUPPORTERS



Dear Aquarium Friends,

The NC Aquarium Society is pleased to present this 2015 Annual Review, highlighting some of the Aquariums' many milestones and achievements of the past year. As we look back, we also can reflect on how far the Aquariums have come since they first opened in September 1976, and look forward to celebrating their 40th anniversary in 2016.

With 1.2 million annual visitors, the three Aquariums and Jennette's Pier continue to be influential leaders in the state, with significant educational, environmental and economic impacts. Far more than just destinations for visiting tourists, the Aquariums have become national leaders in innovation, education, conservation and animal care. The round-the-clock efforts of dedicated staff and volunteers have made our Aquariums among the very best in the nation.

The Aquarium Society is also recognized as among the top zoo and aquarium support groups in the U.S., having recently earned a fourth consecutive four-star rating from nonprofit evaluator Charity Navigator. The Society is proud to continue its partnership with the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources in providing significant private support for the Aquariums. We thank our many donors, members and supporters without whom these measures of success would not be possible.

*Chuck Revelle*

Chuck Revelle, *Chairman of the Board*  
NC Aquarium Society

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# A LOOK BACK AT 2015

## AQUARIUMS OF EXCELLENCE

This year TripAdvisor® named all three NC Aquariums among the top 25 aquariums in the United States. Visitors praised the helpful and friendly staff and volunteers, the breadth of educational experiences both inside the facilities and in the local environment, and the clever ways the Aquariums blend science, discovery and family fun. The Aquarium Society also continued its streak of top ratings from nonprofit evaluator Charity Navigator, receiving its fourth consecutive four-star rating.

## NEW EXHIBITS

The NC Aquariums and Jennette's Pier offer a wide variety of wondrous displays, from sharks and otters to salamanders and honeybees. The staff is always thinking ahead, planning the next family adventure or amazing interactive exhibit. Among the new displays in 2015 were the plankton exhibit *Life in a Drop of Water* at Jennette's Pier, *Lorikeet Landing* at Fort Fisher, *Venom* at Pine Knoll Shores and the return of *Tyrannosaurus Trek* at Roanoke Island. The Sea Turtle Assistance and Rehabilitation (STAR) Center at Roanoke Island, sponsored by Pepsi Bottling Ventures, won the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' 2015 Exhibit Award.

## CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

In recent years, the Aquariums' influence and activity in research and conservation have grown considerably. Aquarium staff and affiliated researchers at partner institutions are working together on groundbreaking projects to better understand our aquatic world. Check out the conservation stories on pages 5 and 6 to learn more about this important work.

## GROWING SUPPORT

Since its launch in 2014, the Society's *Living Treasures* campaign has helped provide much-needed financial backing for exhibits, animals, programs and conservation priorities. The list of private donors continues to grow, and their support is much appreciated. From helping buy food and medicine for cold-stunned sea turtles to sponsorship of major exhibits, Aquarium donors make a difference every day.

## THE BEST IS YET TO COME

With 1.2 million annual visitors, the Aquariums and Jennette's Pier are already among the most popular educational attractions in North Carolina. They're always changing and growing. However, 2016 already looks to be another great year for exhibit improvements and new features. Roanoke Island is undergoing a \$6 million gallery renovation, and several exciting new exhibits are in the works for the other three locations. Learn more on Facebook or at [www.ncaquariums.com](http://www.ncaquariums.com).

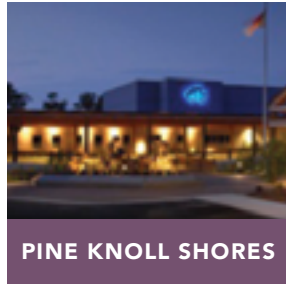
## NORTH CAROLINA'S AQUARIUMS AND JENNETTE'S PIER



**FORT FISHER**

900 Loggerhead Road  
Kure Beach, NC 28449

Fort Fisher was again the most popular NC Aquarium in 2015 with more than 442,000 visitors. Among the must-see features was *Lorikeet Landing*, an interactive aviary experience where visitors got to see and feed these colorful tropical birds. The Aquarium hosted nearly 24,000 school students, and was aided by 190 volunteers who contributed more than 25,000 volunteer hours.



**PINE KNOLL SHORES**

1 Roosevelt Boulevard  
Pine Knoll Shores, NC 28512

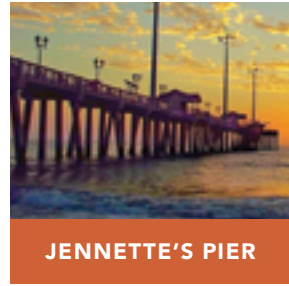
The Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores saw more than 375,000 visitors in 2015 and provided outreach programs to another 18,000. The featured exhibit, *Venom*, proved to be a huge hit. In the area of conservation, more than 60 sea turtles were rehabilitated and 38 were released back into the sea. More than 6,000 specimens were displayed in five galleries, "from the Mountains to the Sea."



**ROANOKE ISLAND**

374 Airport Road  
Manteo, NC 27954

Nearly 300,000 visitors enjoyed the Aquarium on Roanoke Island during 2015. Dinosaurs returned for a second summer with the prehistoric exhibit *Tyrannosaurus Trek*. In its first full year of operation, the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rehabilitation (STAR) Center cared for 60 sea turtle patients. Dedicated volunteers contributed over 12,000 service hours educating guests on the Waters of the Outer Banks.



**JENNETTE'S PIER**

7223 S. Virginia Dare Trail  
Nags Head, NC 27959

Celebrating its fifth anniversary on May 21, Jennette's Pier has emerged as a top spot for fishing on the Outer Banks. In 2015, nearly 190,000 people paid to fish or walk the Pier, and almost 2,000 participants signed up for science camps and other education programs. In addition, the Pier hosted 93 events, including more than 50 wedding receptions – all of which helped generate revenue for operations.

## NORTH CAROLINA AQUARIUMS CELEBRATE 40 YEARS

In addition to launching exciting new exhibits and programs in 2015, the Aquariums also prepared to celebrate an important anniversary. Forty years ago, in 1976, the state Marine Resources Centers opened their doors at Fort Fisher, Pine Knoll Shores and Manteo. Their unique education programs and live exhibits became increasingly popular with the public, and they officially changed their names to the North Carolina Aquariums ten years later in 1986. That same year, the NC Aquarium Society was created as a private nonprofit support group for the three Aquariums.

After major renovations and the addition of the spectacular Jennette's Pier in Nags Head, the Aquariums celebrate their 40th anniversary in 2016. This represents another important milestone in the evolution of an organization whose popularity and impact have never been greater. With over one million annual visitors and more new exhibits and renovations in the works, the Aquariums are poised for an exciting future.

Follow the Aquariums on social media or check your inbox for SEAmail to find out the latest on 40th anniversary events throughout the year.



Aquarium volunteers are on hand to teach visitors about the amazing animals living in the touch tank.

## COLD-STUNNED SEA TURTLES TAKE PRECEDENCE AT ALL THREE AQUARIUMS

Sea turtles have been a beloved species at the Aquariums for almost 40 years. Aquarium staff and volunteers monitor nests on the beach, rescue turtles from predators and freezing weather, and rehabilitate and release the sick and injured. Recently, they jumped into action with the arrival of hundreds of ailing sea turtles.

At the close of 2015, the sudden arrival of winter weather along the North Carolina coast led to a record number of cold-stunned sea turtles needing rescue and rehabilitation. When a turtle is cold-stunned it stops swimming and just floats with the current due to a hypothermia-like response. Some turtles die, some become prey and some wash ashore alive.



Throughout the Aquariums, cold-stunned turtles filled storage areas and available spaces.

The cold continued into 2016 and by January's end, nearly 2,000 sea turtles had washed up on North Carolina's coast, with a large number being treated at all three NC Aquariums. Staff and volunteers assisted with this mass-stranding event, many staying late into the night to give care. Treatment involved drying the turtles, allowing their body temperatures to gradually increase. Work areas around the Aquariums were transitioned into makeshift hospitals.



An Aquarium staff member assesses a cold-stunned sea turtle before removing large barnacles from its shell.

Since that time many turtles recovered, but some needed additional time and care. In mid-January, a number of turtles were transported south for release off the Florida coast or taken directly to warm Gulf Stream waters by the U.S. Coast Guard. Other ailments have kept a few in the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rehabilitation (STAR) Center for further care until deemed healthy enough to survive in the wild.

The rescue of these sea turtles could not have been possible without the hard work and sacrifice of staff, volunteers, donors and supporters. After an appeal for aid, dozens of contributors made gifts to help purchase much-needed food, medicine and supplies.

## ARE YOU USING ALL YOUR AQUARIUM SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS?

When you join the North Carolina Aquariums you not only support a great organization, you also open a world of opportunities that encompass family fun and learning. Your support helps add new exhibits, enhance conservation efforts and increase educational programs that teach young people the importance of our aquatic treasures.

Ranked four out of four stars by the nonprofit watch group, Charity Navigator, the NC Aquarium Society has consistently been recognized as one of the top zoo and aquarium non-profits in the nation. Providing more than \$3 million annually to the Aquariums at Fort Fisher, Pine Knoll Shores, Roanoke Island and Jennette's Pier in Nags Head, the Society appreciates your support!

Aquarium members receive free admission, discounts and reciprocity with over 150 other zoos and aquariums. Learn more at [www.ncaquariumsociety.com](http://www.ncaquariumsociety.com).

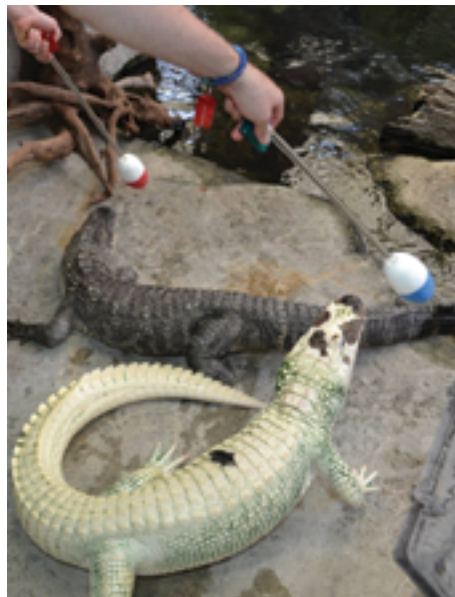
# CONSERVATION EFFORTS

## INVESTING IN A BETTER FUTURE FOR ANIMALS

In 2015, the Aquariums increased efforts to help animals in their care and in the wild. Aquarium staff worked locally, regionally and nationally to improve the lives of animals through generous support from the Aquarium Society.

### *Behavioral Training at the North Carolina Aquariums*

Christian Legner, Aquarium Curator, Roanoke Island



Many of the Aquarium's animals have training plans that are constantly being evaluated and updated.

In September 2015, all three NC Aquariums contracted Precision Behaviors, a team with more than 30 years of animal training experience, to help refine existing behavioral training programs. The Precision team met with staff to observe current training techniques, offer constructive criticism and address specific goals for various animals.

Working with the talented trainers from Precision, Aquarium staff learned how to use appropriate cues, bridges and reinforcement. Behavioral goals include: training moray eels to swim into clear acrylic tubes for individual feeding, targeting various fish to feed in a specific location and training sea turtles to come to a target to feed. Complex goals include: training river otters to allow injections without restraint, teaching a bald eagle to move into a transport crate on command and having sand tiger sharks swim into a stretcher for veterinary exams. We are excited about continuing to work with Precision Behavior for the best animal care and welfare.

### *Getting Up Close and Personal with Sand Tiger Sharks*

Dr. Emily Christiansen, Aquarium Veterinarian and Britt Purtee, Aquarist, Roanoke Island

Sand tiger sharks face numerous threats to their survival in the wild. Along with many others, the NC Aquariums are striving to optimize care of these animals and work towards reproduction in managed care to minimize collection of animals from the wild. In October 2015, three NC Aquariums staff members visited Georgia Aquarium's Marineland facility in St. Augustine, Florida to observe health and ultrasound examinations on adult sand tiger sharks.

We were able to observe exams on two male and two female sharks, including capture, holding techniques, veterinary procedures and recovery monitoring. It was an excellent opportunity to learn from experienced shark caretakers from Marineland and the Georgia Aquarium.



The North Carolina Aquariums continue to develop and refine their animal care programs.

to talk about sharks. Some of the most prestigious aquariums in the U.S. participated, including the Georgia Aquarium, SeaWorld, Mote Marine Laboratory and the Aquarium of the Pacific. The goal was to develop a long-term strategy for a sustainable population of sand tiger sharks.

At White Oak, the group created a vision, developed goals and set timelines to move toward better management of sand tiger sharks. Significant accomplishments include: successful semen collection, proper shark handling techniques, baseline sonograms and two opportunistic artificial inseminations of different species.

Through collaboration, the NC Aquariums are hoping to discover and study the mysteries of sand tiger shark reproduction. As we move forward, aquariums around the U.S. will work together to create a network for artificial insemination, veterinary care and eventually natural breeding in captivity.

### *Saving Gopher Frogs*

Nate Akers, Conservation Technician, Fort Fisher

The Aquarium at Fort Fisher (NCAFF) is taking a "leap" for conservation of a threatened amphibian. The Carolina gopher frog previously had more than 30 populations across North Carolina, however only six populations remain today. Pressured by habitat destruction, drought and diseases, the frogs face a high risk of local extinction. To offset the rapid decline, we collaborated with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) to supplement natural breeding efforts. Along with NCWRC biologists, we are attempting to stabilize existing populations of gopher frogs in key areas without compromising the genetic diversity of the species.

During the breeding season, staff collected small portions of egg masses at natal sites, while NCAFF staff cared for them through hatching and metamorphosis to small frogs. The Aquarium released 132 healthy gopher frogs tagged with a Visual Implant Elastomer. The tags will help us identify frogs when captured in future survey efforts. The frogs released outnumber expected natural recruitment estimations, and as the program grows and its protocols are perfected, we can help gopher frogs have a brighter future in North Carolina.



These Carolina gopher frogs are in the middle of metamorphosis at the Aquarium at Fort Fisher.

We observed specialized ultrasound and reproductive techniques that we will eventually use with our animals, including the collection of semen from males by the Southeast Zoo Alliance for Reproduction and Conservation (SEZARC).

In December, SEZARC hosted and facilitated a gathering at the White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee, Florida. We initiated the gathering, with the support of the Florida Aquarium.

Aquarium leaders from across the country gathered with these experts



## LIVING TREASURES



## NEW IN 2016

### WHAT OUR SUPPORTERS ARE SAYING



"We are proud to support the Aquarium Society here on the Outer Banks. They make our community and economy better, and that makes our towns a better place to live."

Clark Twiddy, Chief Executive Officer  
Twiddy & Company Realtors

"We absolutely love our aquarium and Jennette's Pier, and feel strongly about supporting them. Not only do they do great work in education and conservation, they're both major players for the Outer Banks tourism economy. That's why we're happy to contribute to their success!"

Steve and Shelly Bembridge  
Bembridge Insurance Agencies



"Transportation Impact is proud to support the Aquarium Society and its efforts to conserve and educate others about North Carolina's aquatic life. We are always happy to work with Aquarium leaders and the Society to better the Aquariums and our coast."

Keith Byrd, Co-Founder and Partner  
Transportation Impact



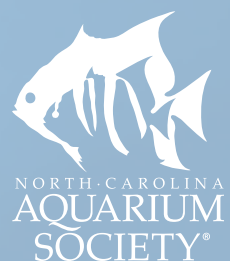
# KEEP US SWIMMING AROUND

When you contribute to the Aquarium Society's *Living Treasures Annual Fund*, you help protect and celebrate the wonders of nature for generations to come.

Your contributions can champion the following initiatives:

- Add Exciting Exhibits and Live Animals
- Bring Science Education to Life
- Enhance State-of-the-Art Learning Technology
- Support Animal Rescue, Habitat Restoration and Conservation Priorities
- Sustain Our State's *Living Treasures*

**MAKE YOUR DONATION TODAY!**



FOR MORE DETAILS,  
VISIT [NCAQUARIUMSOCIETY.COM](http://NCAQUARIUMSOCIETY.COM)



*For forty years, Aquarium educators have been a resource for North Carolina school teachers—in the classroom—as well as in the marsh, the water and on the beach.*



*Aquarium Scholars* is a new partnership between the NC Aquariums, NC Public Schools and the NC Aquarium Society where private donors fund access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) programs for Title I schools across North Carolina. These schools have large numbers of low-wealth students and are unable to afford the travel expenses and program costs associated with experiencing Aquarium education programs.

*Aquarium Scholars* will help these schools fund trips to one of the Aquariums or Jennette's Pier, support distance learning experiences or allow staff to bring live animals to the classroom. Each of these programs inspires students to connect with science and nature. The Aquarium Society is now seeking North Carolina business and community leaders to join in supporting this new program.

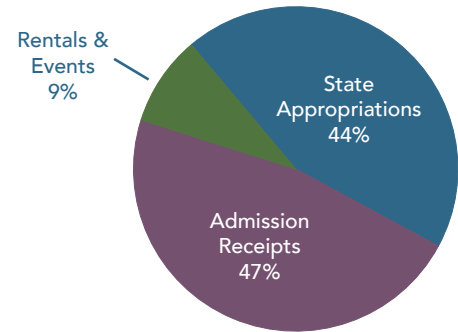
For more information and to discuss sponsorship opportunities contact  
Jay Barnes, 1-800-832-FISH (3474) / [jay.barnes@ncaquariums.com](mailto:jay.barnes@ncaquariums.com)



## NC AQUARIUMS BY THE NUMBERS

As the Aquariums approach their 40th anniversary, it's important to note that their enduring success is thanks to a dedicated staff, enthusiastic volunteers, broad support from state leaders and private support made available through the Aquarium Society. As state appropriations for the Aquariums have continued to decline, private dollars are more crucial than ever. Thanks to an entrepreneurial approach, the Aquariums now fund more than half of their operational needs from earned revenue and private contributions.

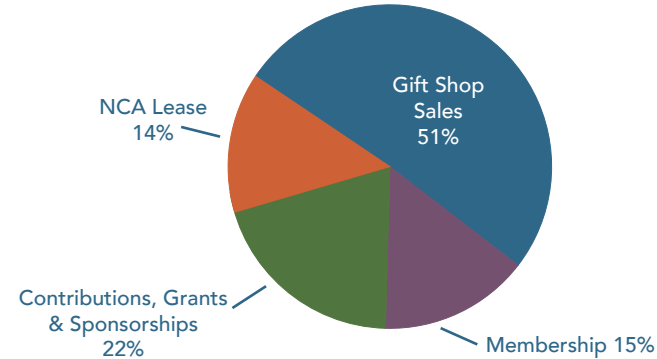
### 2015 NC AQUARIUMS & JENNETTE'S PIER



#### REVENUE (ROUNDED)

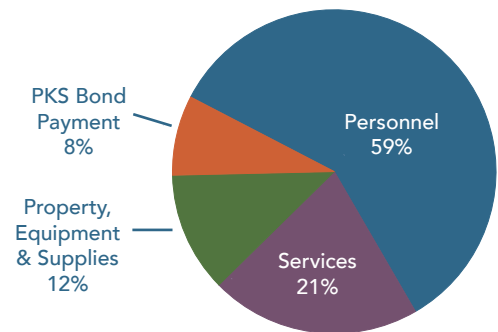
State Appropriations	\$7.05 million
Admission Receipts	\$7.61 million
Rentals & Events	\$1.37 million
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$16.03 million</b>

### 2015 AQUARIUM SOCIETY



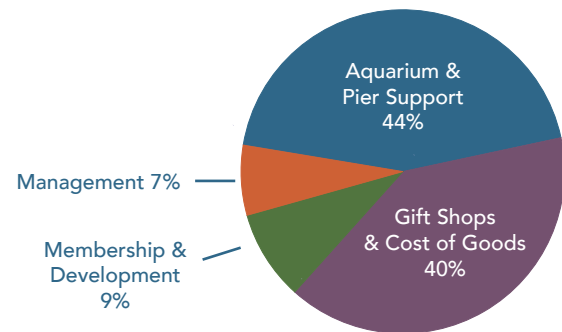
#### REVENUE (ROUNDED)

Gift Shop Sales	\$4.34 million
Membership	\$1.23 million
Contributions, Grants & Sponsorships	\$1.88 million
Investments	-\$0.20 million
NCA Lease	\$1.22 million
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$8.47 million</b>



#### EXPENSES (ROUNDED)

Personnel	\$9.16 million
Services	\$3.17 million
Property, Equipment & Supplies	\$1.80 million
PKS Bond Payment	\$1.27 million
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$15.40 million</b>



#### EXPENSES (ROUNDED)

Aquarium & Pier Support	\$3.90 million
Gift Shops & Cost of Goods	\$3.53 million
Membership & Development	\$0.77 million
Management	\$0.62 million
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$8.82 million</b>

For more detailed information, including financial records and organizational history, visit [www.ncaquariumsociety.com](http://www.ncaquariumsociety.com).

## ROANOKE ISLAND STAR CENTER RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AWARD



Visitors can witness Aquarium staff interacting with sea turtles in the STAR center.



Interactive displays in the STAR Center educate and entertain visitors of all ages.

In September 2015, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) recognized the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rehabilitation (STAR) Center care facility and visitor experience with the prestigious Exhibit Award in the category of Top Honors for institutions under a \$5 million annual operating budget. The STAR Center was conceived in 2011 and opened to the public in June 2014 to immediate popular acclaim. Thanks to sponsorship by Pepsi Bottling Ventures, state funds and the Aquarium's partnership with the regional non-profit Network for Endangered Sea Turtles (NEST), the STAR Center has been a temporary home for almost 800 sea turtles in need of immediate assistance. Collaborations with NC State's School of Veterinary Medicine, College of Engineering and Center for Marine Sciences & Technology brought about groundbreaking approaches to sea turtle recovery. With this support, the STAR Center continues to educate visitors through one-on-one contact with staff and volunteers.

## PINE KNOLL SHORES OUTREACH PROGRAM BRINGS THE BEACH WITHIN REACH

How do you connect students in a central South American classroom with sea turtles at the NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores? It's easy, really.

Now, thanks to live-streaming technology, the Aquarium Outreach Program takes animal experiences and conservation education almost anywhere. A program that was once limited to a portion of North Carolina now has no boundaries.

"We teach about sea turtles," said Samantha Betancur, Aquarium Outreach Coordinator. "A lot of the people we talk with live in places that don't have an ocean nearby. We help spread the word about ways they can protect sea turtles and the environment around them."

In addition to distance-learning, Outreach continues to make "the beach within reach" for thousands of North Carolina students and visitors. In 2015, nearly 50,000 people participated in Aquarium Outreach programs (18,000 from Pine Knoll Shores) through schools, festivals and other events.

The Outreach Program continues to develop unique offerings for patients and their families at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Through a partnership with the university's Wonder Connection program, Aquarium Outreach educators present programs and animals to cancer patients, burn victims, pediatric intensive care patients, and students at the psychiatric hospital school.



Aquarium Outreach programs teach students around the world about the wonders of North Carolina's aquatic life.

## DINOSAURS INVADE FORT FISHER

Throughout the fall of 2015, staff at the Aquarium at Fort Fisher worked hard to prepare for the arrival of another popular seasonal display.

A splash. A roar. A flutter. Visitors to the Aquarium will experience it all this spring. Step back millions of years and experience *DINOSAURS!* Massive animatronic beasts will roar, spit and wow visitors young and old.

In addition to *DINOSAURS!*, the Aquarium welcomes the return of the *Butterfly Bungalow*. Hundreds of free-flying, exotic butterflies create an immersive experience, landing on shoulders, hands and heads. Through their encounters with these colorful beauties, guests will enjoy an up-close experience and learn the importance of butterflies and other pollinators.



A stroll through the Aquarium's outdoor garden will reveal a fearsome T-Rex, a 23-foot-long brachiosaurus and four other life-sized, prehistoric creatures.

## JENNETTE'S PIER DISPLAY HIGHLIGHTS LIFE IN A DROP OF WATER

Have you ever wondered what microscopic life forms live in a drop of ocean water? This new exhibit explains everything about it! With the help of a giant touch screen, visitors learn to identify and pronounce the names of various plankton species and come to understand why they are the most vital part of the marine ecosystem.

### Jennette's Pier Presents: Life on the Ledge

Be sure to check out the Pier's newest exhibit, *Life on the Ledge*, located in the pier house gallery. This 3,000-gallon aquarium features a custom background that represents an underwater coquina rock shelf. The vertical tank will display several eels and dozens of fish. Twiddy & Company of Duck sponsored the exciting new exhibit.



From plant to animal plankton, this interactive exhibit features the many different types of tiny organisms that you can't see with the naked eye.



# DONOR RECOGNITION

### MAJOR DONORS

The NC Aquarium Society gratefully acknowledges the following generous major donors for their cumulative giving in support of the NC Aquariums and Jennette's Pier.

### Grand Benefactors

(Gifts of \$1 Million or More)

NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund  
 NC Waterfront Access & Marine Industry Fund  
 Pepsi Bottling Ventures / Pepsico  
 Triad Foundation

### Benefactors

(Gifts of \$500,000 - \$1 Million)

Dare County  
 Dominion NC Power  
 NC Association of Outdoor Advertisers  
 NC Coastal Recreational Fishing License Program  
 NOAA – National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration

### Guardians

(Gifts of \$100,000 - \$500,000)

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### Conservators

(Gifts of \$25,000 - \$100,000)

Association of Zoos & Aquariums MACE Award  
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(Gifts of \$5,000 - \$25,000)

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