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Contact: Ruth Davis
Ruth Davis Associates
Tel: 401-497-6684
Email: ruth1davis@gmail.com

Marcia Bittner
The Maritime Aquarium
203-852-0700, ext. 2241
mbittner@maritimeaquarium.org

MARITIME AQUARIUM MASTER PLAN: GALLERY DESCRIPTIONS

NORWALK, CT (October 17, 2007) -The Master Plan for The Maritime Aquarium, created by Thinc Design, presents a powerful vision for the Aquarium as *the* place to discover Long Island Sound and its watershed. A fresh interpretive program, a clear public identity, innovative galleries and exhibits and a revitalized physical plant, will provide the framework for a new understanding of this important and vulnerable ecosystem.

The plan includes a new entrance, and orientation area, revisions to the Great Hall, and the introduction of two galleries —**Shores of the Sound** and **Winter in the Sound**. Additionally, the IMAX theater will be upgraded to handle longer feature films. The Aquarium's current 140,000 gross square feet will increase to approximately 160,000 gross square feet, and the volume of aquarium water will nearly triple from 180,000 gallons to approximately 530,000 gallons. A revitalized presence on the streetscape will further link this cultural resource with the surrounding South Norwalk (SoNo) community.

The Master Plan builds upon The Maritime Aquarium's core strength in connecting visitors directly to living organisms (animals, plants, microorganisms) and presents them as actors and protagonists, along with humans, in dynamically shaping and conserving the Sound and its Watershed. The Aquarium will provide us with an awareness that each of us —humans, beavers, sea turtles, sharks, phytoplankton, jellyfish, lobsters, oysters, cod, horseshoe crabs —has

—more—

a role to play in this unique ecosystem.

Information will be surprising to many —and will be delivered through rich and delightful interactions. Evocative sounds and sights of waves lead into factual information. We learn that the Sound has the greatest temperature variation of any in the world and that it connects to rivers and streams as far away as Canada. As we watch otters play, glide and swim through the Aquarium, we find that these highly mobile members of the weasel family have a “home range” that extends as far as 48 miles, through rivers, streams and marshes. Schools of shad, the state fish of Connecticut, and the most abundant anadromous (spawning in freshwater rivers and living most of their adult lives in the oceans) fish on the east coast, mesmerize us as they shimmer and glisten in their tank. Delving deeper, we learn that shad link the Atlantic Ocean to the Watershed of Long Island Sound through their spawning cycle: when the urge to spawn strikes in the spring, shad travel hundreds of miles back to the same stretch of river where they originally hatched.

As we participate and become immersed in the life within the Aquarium we are brought us closer to a personal significance of the Sound’s ecosystem.

GALLERY DESCRIPTIONS

NEW ENTRANCE

The Maritime Aquarium’s new entrance along the SoNo streetscape will deliver a clear message that this is a thrilling and inviting aquarium to visit. A ramp leads gently to a long glassy vestibule which doubles as queuing and leads up to the main arrival and ticketing area at the second level. The living roof and skylights embedded with photovoltaic cells atop the entry signal the Aquarium’s commitment to sustainability, to fostering relationships with nature and to improving energy efficiency using contemporary green building methods. The position of the new entrance, directly opposite the huge buoy that marks the exit from the Maritime Garage, is

an intuitive entry point for members and the general public alike.

As we start up the ramp, an 18-foot glittering wall of large, schooling, silvery shad comes into view through the glass wall to our left. In the queuing area ahead, a video shows the Sound as a diving bird might experience it, or a swiftly moving seal, giving us a glimpse of this familiar environment from an entirely new perspective.

After picking up our tickets, we move past the shad tank, which offers views on two sides and intuitively directs us inward, toward the Orientation. From here, the Overlook on the second floor balcony, we see out over the revamped Great Hall, with the seals below, swimming together and hauling out to feed. A vibrant sculpture that represents the web of marine life, featuring fish of many sizes, is suspended from the ceiling. From here, we may choose to explore the Orientation area further or cross over the bridge toward an Ocean Playspace and Discovery Room.

ORIENTATION

This highly interactive area introduces the visitor to Long Island Sound, a dynamic system in constant flux between tides, seasons, salinity levels, and across time since its creation by the retreat of the glaciers.

Approaching a free standing, curving wall, we discover images and artifacts that evoke the Sound's vitality, seasonality, and majesty. We are introduced to the oyster and the horseshoe crab in small exhibits, discovering the role each plays in this ecosystem and the relationship each has had to humans over time. A shark's jaw and other evocative objects highlight different facets of the Sound's story and the stories of the organisms that inhabit it. On the other side of the wall, projected depictions of coastal vistas and land formations activate the space.

A large map of the Sound projected onto the floor fades away into bright, animated circles of grey-blue rippling water, beckoning us to enter. Stepping into one of these circles feels as if we

are playing with pools of water, and our play triggers a surprising interaction. A projection of a shark appears and swims around our feet while a brief account about the shark's presence and experience in the Sound is heard from a focused speaker overhead. As a child moves into another rippling circle and sits upon the rocky seat at its center, we see a beaver appear at her feet as she listens intently to the story playing from over her head. We explore a few more circles as we walk to the far end of the space, meeting randomly triggered protagonists as we go.

SHORES OF THE SOUND

The Shores of the Sound introduces this surprisingly varied, productive, and beautiful— home to an enormous diversity of creatures.

We notice a large circular window adjacent to the Orientation area and stick our heads into it just as a wave hits. Sounds of birds' cries and crashing waves draw us into the bright, sunlit Shores of the Sound, a spectacular, glass-walled space with views of the Norwalk River.

The sound of powerful waves crashing against a rocky shore, breaking over our heads, draws us into the gallery. We see skittering shorebirds and beautiful diamondback terrapins living among tall marsh grasses and along soft sandy edges in the southern corner, where, peering down, we can see fish darting back and forth in the gently lapping water. River otters chase each other through multi-level pools in an adjacent marsh, and we catch a glimpse of their bellies as they playfully and joyfully slide through an acrylic chute. An approach to a ladder leads children to a slide within the otters' habitat, giving them a chance to engage in parallel play alongside these amazing animals. .

WINTER IN THE SOUND

Only a few fishes in the waters of the Sound can tolerate the changes in temperature and decline in food resources that come with the onset of winter.

We follow a school of herring around a large tank, spying conger eels that hide in a trawler wreck as other fish swim past. The cold color and light of the gallery are a marked contrast to the other exhibits. Listening to a wintery soundscape, we are reminded of what winter feels like on land, and a small exhibit introduces us to less extreme changes winter brings to the ocean. We come upon a series of exhibits that offer us close-up views of many winter inhabitants of the Sound. Gently swaying kelp draws us toward a dramatic floor to ceiling window. Halibut glide along the sandy bottom below our feet. At eye level, cod and haddock swim slowly past rocky cliff faces encrusted with barnacles and sponges. Looking up, we see a school of herring silhouetted by sunlight coming through the turbulent water high above.

GREAT HALL

This magnificent, sunlit hall is a gathering space and a hub within the Aquarium.

Three live exhibits—seals, jellies, and a ray tank—border the space, and a floor treatment depicts the Sound and its watershed. High above, a vibrant sculpture suspended from the ceiling depicts a marine food web, with fish of all shapes and sizes animating the space. We see the seal pool before us as we enter the hall. We notice a group of schoolchildren gathered inside the shape of the Sound on the floor, slowly walking up the “rivers” lay out before them. As we approach a darkened alcove, a beautifully lit jellyfish exhibit comes into view. Behind us, children gather at the broad and low ray tank, clambering to get a close-up view.

SEAL POOL

Many harbor seals inhabit the Sound during winter, feeding and hauling out onto rocks and sandbars. When summer arrives, they migrate northward to the coast of Maine, just as many humans do.

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We glimpse a seal sliding into the water as we approach their open pool, and looking down over the edge, we can see them swim out of the building and back in again. Taking a seat by the window, we have a full underwater view as they pass after pausing to inspect us, nose-to-nose.

At this point, the visitor will have the opportunity to continue to explore a wide variety of exhibits, participate in the docents' sessions, re-visit areas that intrigue them, go onto the IMAX theater for a show, eat in the cafeteria, or browse in the Gift shop.

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