



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Thom Benson 423-785-3007

Tennessee Aquarium main galleries and special exhibits

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (May 24, 2011) – Imagine a single raindrop that flows from a mountaintop stream to a chattering creek, travels into a lazy river and finally joins a vast ocean. The Tennessee Aquarium offers an up-close look at the habitats found along this amazing journey.

The Aquarium tells the story of water through exhibits in the River and Ocean Journey buildings, which feature many different types of freshwater and saltwater wildlife. Not only do visitors explore habitats found in North America and the Gulf of Mexico, they also experience habitats from around the watery world. In addition, the Aquarium showcases several special exhibits, which contain a variety of exotic plant and animal life.

Appalachian Cove Forest

The Appalachian Cove Forest in the River Journey building recreates the mountain source of the Tennessee River. This living recreation of a cove hardwood forest mirrors the current season with deciduous trees, blossoming plants and animal activity.

Upon entering, visitors are surrounded by an ancient forest; the sounds of chirping birds, a cascading waterfall and whimsical river otters splashing around. The forest is remarkably realistic; its air is moist and thick; its trees are filled with birds; its streams and pools are inhabited by fish; and amphibians and reptiles find refuge in hollow logs. Light in the forest changes with the time of day, and plant life changes with the seasons.

The cove features several types of trout, North American river otters, beautiful cardinals and a copperhead snake. Also, visitors can see free-flying songbirds, including year-round and migratory species, and observe a colorful landscape highlighted by rhododendrons, azaleas and wildflowers.

Tennessee River Gallery

As Appalachian raindrops merge and begin to trickle into streams, they eventually reach the Tennessee River. The river has been carefully controlled by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) since the 1930s and is a reservoir system harnessed by 35 dams.

(more)

The Tennessee River gallery in River Journey examines the river, comparing the wild Tennessee with these new, man-made environments.

With mountain music filling the air and enormous pictures capturing the natural beauty of East Tennessee, this gallery has three major exhibits to explore: Nickajack Lake, Reelfoot Lake and “Turtles: Nature’s Living Sculptures.”

Nickajack Lake was once shoreline and was created by TVA in the 1930s to reduce flooding and provide a reliable source of drinking water for the state’s citizens. The Nickajack Lake exhibit is 25 feet deep and contains more than 30 species of fish, including sunfish, which are found at its shorelines, and the bass and catfish that swim in its depths. Some of the Aquarium’s most loveable inhabitants play here: the diving ducks, which “perform” for visitors by diving for food, then bob like corks to the surface.

Reelfoot Lake is perhaps the most unusual lake in the United States. It was formed in 1812 as the result of a massive earthquake centered under New Madrid, Mo. The quake’s force caused 18,000 acres of cypress swamp to sink 10 feet to form a basin that was covered by water as the Mississippi River briefly ran upstream. The Reelfoot Lake exhibit includes turtles, amphibians that live on the lake’s shores and larger fish, like bass, bowfin and paddlefish that inhabit the exhibit’s open water.

Visitors can also wander through the world’s largest collection of freshwater turtles, known as the “Turtles: Nature’s Living Sculptures” gallery, and stare in amazement at the architecture of a variety of turtle shells from around the world. The exhibit provides a small sample of the remaining 260 turtle species on the planet. They can see the unusual pancake tortoise, snake-necked turtle and Chinese big-headed turtle, with its parrot-like beak, while learning how to determine a turtle’s age and how temperature establishes its sex. The exhibit also features a turtle nursery of several baby turtles from around the world, like the chicken turtle and black-breasted leaf turtle. Each turtle in the nursery was hatched at the Aquarium and is carefully monitored while maturing as part of the Aquarium’s conservation efforts to maintain turtle populations.

Discovery Hall

As the water from the Tennessee River meets the Ohio River and empties into the mighty Mississippi, a moist, swampy environment is created. In River Journey’s Discovery Hall visitors explore the humid, damp habitats of the Southeast region, as tiny alligators and a variety of tree frogs chirp and call.

With instrumental bluegrass music in the background, guests explore an underwater world where vibrantly colored sunfish float like jewels or peak into the swamp nursery where baby alligators bask. They can also reach out and touch an ancient-looking lake sturgeon that once ruled the rivers of Tennessee in a unique touch exhibit.

In addition, visitors can get an up-close look at the strange, spatula-shaped snout of the paddlefish and the huge claws of the painted river prawn to learn about their adaptations. Also, they can see the nation’s largest salamander, the hellbender, which breathes through its skin and uses its lungs as flotation devices.

(more)

Mississippi Delta

The Mississippi Delta Country gallery in the River Journey building examines the final leg of the water's journey as it slows in the Mississippi River to meet the Gulf of Mexico. Often perceived as a land of stagnation, the re-created cypress swamp is actually a virtual river of trees.

Visitors proceed along the boardwalk in this exhibit to see animals like the extraordinarily large alligator snapping turtle, red-bellied turtles and American alligators slosh through the swampy waters amidst a tangle of tree trunks, vines and hanging moss. Bowfin, bass and sunfish swim in the shallow pools while herons patrol the shoreline.

Gulf of Mexico

As the Mississippi pours into the open ocean it joins with the Gulf of Mexico. In this River Journey exhibit, visitors view large cross-sections of transitional area. Green moray eels and small reef fish hide among the mangrove roots colorful yellow snapper, southern stingrays and silvery barracuda glide gracefully through the deeper waters of this exhibit. The Gulf of Mexico contains creatures of all shapes and sizes, including more than 40 species of fish and a green sea turtle. This exhibit also features exotic creatures like the snake-like green moray eel and the small bonnethead shark, which resembles a tiny version of the looming hammerhead shark.

Secret Reef

A bit further into the blue depths of the ocean, about 115 miles south of Texas, an exotic, multi-colored coral environment exists in harmony. This reef system, the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, is the northernmost reef in North America and is inspiration for the Secret Reef exhibit in the Aquarium's new Ocean Journey building.

In the exhibit, the beautiful coral formations are artificial mimics of the Flower Garden Banks, and the conditions of the exhibit are carefully monitored by the staff.

Perfectly depicted in a dimly-lit gallery with mystical, underwater music, this exhibit features the Aquarium's most jaw-dropping animals: toothy, 10-foot, sand tiger sharks. In addition, guests can watch in amazement as thousands of smaller reef fish swim about, like the beautiful queen angelfish and famous dark blue, black and neon yellow blue tang. Like the animals in the actual Flower Garden Banks reef system, the smaller fish in the exhibit tend to stay close to the reef formations. Meanwhile the larger, open-ocean animals, such as the sleek sandbar sharks and robust Crevalle jacks, swim above.

Dive shows take place each day in the Secret Reef at 11 and 11:30 a.m. and 2 and 2:30 p.m.

Undersea Cavern

The adventure continues as visitors make their way further into the depths of the Secret Reef in Ocean Journey. A wonder in itself, the Undersea Cavern provides breathtaking, panoramic views of the Secret Reef.

(more)

Visitors feel as if they are floating in a bubble deep in the ocean while surrounded by thousands of curious saltwater creatures, like colorful fish and enormous sharks, in a fantastic, brightly-colored coral setting. As they make their way through the cavern, they can view bottom feeders and observe the behaviors of mysterious saltwater life as if they were actually deep-sea divers. Visitors are amazed when 10-foot sharks swim slowly above their heads and schools of darting fish move to and fro in every direction around them.

The remarkable journey continues to other parts of the world:

Rivers of the World

With exotic and exciting sights from around the world, the Rivers of the World gallery in River Journey feels like a planet all on its own. When visitors enter, they get a special “taste” of countries of different continents at every angle of the gallery, while sounds of rapids and dripping water play in the distance, reminding them of the Aquarium story.

With fantastic creatures exhibited, the Rivers of the World gallery showcases sights from the Amazon, Congo, St. Lawrence, Volga and Fly Rivers as well as from tropical Eurasian waters.

Three exhibits are devoted to the Amazon, the world’s largest river. One displays smaller, brightly-colored fish, frogs, lizards and turtles from the region; a second contains the feared red-bellied piranha and anaconda. The largest exhibit depicts the beautiful “flooded forest” created each year during the rainy season when the river rises 30 to 40 feet. A sampling of the 3,000 species that live in the Amazon swim among the tree branches in the 35,000-gallon exhibit.

The St. Lawrence exhibit presents the great predators of cold Northern waters, including northern pike and Atlantic salmon.

The Fly River flows in New Guinea, the highest tropical island in the world with mountains tall enough to support glaciers. The Fly River exhibit features rainbow fish and pig-nosed turtles.

The Nishikigoi exhibit features koi: fish that are rich in Japanese history. These colorful carp were selectively bred creating many varieties and colors of the species. They are now being sold for garden ponds and are displayed as works of art in Japan, where a high value is placed on the best fish.

The Volga River (Russia) exhibit holds fish that were once common in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union but are now endangered or threatened. This includes the enormous Beluga sturgeon. The Volga is a massive waterway, stretching more than 2,000 miles, and was once one of the largest freshwater fisheries in Europe. Today, the river is the heart of an intricate transportation system, and pollution, habitat destruction and over-fishing are creating a sharp decline in native fish populations.

(more)

The warm water Eurasian exhibit contains brightly-colored fish and turtles from the warm, slow-moving waters of Southeast Asia. Gourami, danio, barbs and four-eyed turtles are among the specimens featured.

Tropical Cove

The Tropical Cove in Ocean Journey beckons visitors into its misty, tropical rainforest paradise with its lush, colorful flowers, welcoming greenery, bird songs, cascading waterfall and unique touch station.

At the Forest Pool, guests are captivated by freshwater stingrays like the black, white-blotched, tiger and vermiculate river rays, as well as young arowana. Both the black and tiger stingrays are considered threatened species and are the focus of an Aquarium breeding effort.

As visitors continue their journey, the sounds of birdcalls fill the air, and they catch sight of a majestic bird with striking blue feathers in Macaw Glade. Reaching heights of more than 3 feet and a wingspan of more than 4 feet, the hyacinth macaw is a member of the parrot family and has the strongest beak of any bird in the world. This beautiful bird has deep cobalt blue feathers that are offset by yellow eye rings and face patches.

The next exhibit, Shark Island, is the Aquarium's largest touch station, with more than 100 feet of shoreline. Guests can touch nearly 100 harmless sharks and stingrays, while Aquarium education staff members share interesting facts about these animals. The small epaulette and bamboo sharks found in this pool are harmless and have rough skins that are covered with scales. The stingrays of Shark Island are smooth to the touch and do not have stinging barbs.

Boneless Beauties

Visitors can leave the Tropical Cove for another magical, exotic experience in Ocean Journey's special exhibition, "Boneless Beauties." Mystical music plays in the background while the weird and whimsical invertebrates pulsate, dance and draw visitors into their spell. Despite their drastically different appearances, the creatures in this dimly lit gallery share one common trait – the lack of a backbone. The "Boneless Beauties" gallery showcases some of the most fascinating and bizarre animals on earth, including the wondrous, giant Pacific octopus, the giant Japanese spider crab, the hovering, squid-like cuttlefish and those spineless, brainless wonders: the electrifying jellyfish.

In addition, the gallery features a unique, domed pop-up tank, where guests can observe the intriguing lifestyles of several giant spider crabs and some brown-striped pinecone fish as if they were floating in a bubble in the middle of the tank.

Seahorses: Beyond Imagination

"Seahorses: Beyond Imagination" brings to life the world of enchanting seahorses, legendary seadragons and colorful pipefish through exhibits, innovative graphic displays and video presentations. Visitors to this special exhibition travel to a lush Tasmanian kelp bed, a colorful Galapagos reef wall, the Florida Keys, a portion of the Chesapeake Bay and a reef edge in the Philippines to meet the animals that live in these habitats.

(more)

In addition, guests may use interactive touch computer screens to learn more about seahorse behavior and conservation. Children can join a school of multi-colored reef fish when they climb into the pop-up tank, a domed exhibit that makes kids feel like they're immersed in the water with the animals. Finally, the gallery features a larger-than-life, three-dimensional model of a seahorse - a hands-on opportunity to learn about the parts of a seahorse and appreciate its natural wonder.

Highlights of the mystifying seahorse gallery include the rarely seen weedy and leafy seadragons. These unusual seahorse cousins look like fairytale dragons, floating through the water with leaf-like "wings." These flowery appendages provide excellent camouflage in their native Australian kelp beds.

Other gallery inhabitants include yellow seahorses; aptly named potbellied seahorses; lined seahorses and several species of pipefish, including the voracious alligator pipefish and the striking bluestripe pipefish.

Ranger Rick's Backyard Safari

Discover dazzling animal presentations with cool creatures from our backyards and habitats from around the world in Ranger Rick's Backyard Safari. This new experience, in partnership with National Wildlife Federation introduces guests to amazing creatures in a fun and insightful manner.

The Aquarium's husbandry and education departments have been creating a whole menu of new programs for this safari. Visitors traverse learn about habitats, adaptations and unusual behaviors during up-close animal encounters. They will be thrilled to meet a Eurasian eagle owl and they'll laugh at the amusing mimicry of Happy Jack, the talking Amazon parrot. Both the young and young at heart will smile as they're introduced to additional birds, furry creatures and other animals with scales and shells.

Ranger Rick's Backyard Safari is an experience that will "follow you home," connecting guests with nature at the Aquarium and inspiring them to explore and improve backyard habitat at home.

Penguins' Rock

Venture into the world of cold-climate penguins at Penguins' Rock in the Ocean Journey building. Gentoo and macaroni penguins are constantly diving into and rocketing out of the water in this gallery. Many visitors are surprised by the size of these sub-Antarctic birds. Gentoos are the third largest penguin species in the world, while macaronis are the largest of the crested penguin species.

Penguins' Rock features a wave generator which creates ocean swells gently washing back and forth across the rocky shoreline. The gentoo and macaroni penguins love to ride these waves, often spending time "body surfing" and observing the guests. This face to beak experience is truly captivating for all ages.

Larger than life penguin models perched on a rocky island create a fun family photo opportunity. Video monitors and interactive graphics invite visitors to enjoy a fact-filled scavenger hunt revealing the top 10 reasons we think penguins' rock.

Butterfly Garden

Visitors can venture into the beautiful Butterfly Garden in the Ocean Journey building, where the sounds of birds and splashing water fill the air. It's a garden overflowing with exotic flowers, a sparkling, cascading waterfall and hundreds of jewel-hued, free-flying butterflies. The sunny Butterfly Garden immerses guests in an interactive experience where the butterflies flutter among, and even occasionally land on, the visitors. The butterflies found in the garden include species from Asia, Africa, South and Central America.

Guests who come to the Butterfly Garden can observe adult butterflies, study a variety of chrysalises and learn some interesting facts about the creatures and their habitats. Those who are patient may even have the opportunity to watch as an adult emerges from the chrysalis, spreads its wings and eventually takes flight.

(more)

Other areas of the Butterfly Garden promote butterfly watching, butterfly gardening and other aspects of butterfly conservation. Visitors learn how butterfly farming helps to protect rainforests by providing farmers an alternative to clearing the delicate habitat of a tropical rainforest.

Once visitors have completed this extraordinary journey through the Aquarium, they will leave with an inspired, heightened sense of wonder and appreciation for animals and plants of all shapes and sizes from around the world.

Jellies: Living Art

The Tennessee Aquarium and Hunter Museum of American Art have collaborated to bring *Jellies: Living Art* to Chattanooga. This special exhibition showcases six species of jellyfish, each distinct in appearance and among the most mysterious creatures on Earth, alongside breathtaking glass sculptures. *Jellies: Living Art* was inspired by the award-winning, highly rated gallery at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. A variety of jellyfish species intrigue guests as they discover how the rhythm, motion, color and patterns of nature have fueled artistic expression. Visitors will also be captivated by the delicate beauty of glass installations by renowned artists Dale Chihuly, Stephen Rolfe Powell, Cork Marcheschi and Thomas Spake. Works of art chosen for this exhibition are featured at both the Tennessee Aquarium and the Hunter Museum.

###

The Tennessee Aquarium inspires wonder, appreciation and protection of water and all life that it sustains. Admission is \$24.95 per adult and \$14.95 per child, ages 3-12. Each ticket purchased helps support Aquarium conservation programs. The IMAX® 3D Theater is next door to the Aquarium. Ticket prices are \$8.50 per adult and \$6.00 per child. Aquarium/IMAX combo tickets are \$29.95 for adults and \$19.95 for children. Excursions aboard the new River Gorge Explorer depart daily into "Tennessee's Grand Canyon." Cruise tickets are \$29.00 per adult and \$21.50 per child (3-12). Advance tickets may be purchased online at www.tnaqua.org or by phone at 1-800-262-0695. The Aquarium, located on the banks of the Tennessee River in Chattanooga, is a non-profit organization. Open every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas, the Aquarium and IMAX are accessible to people with disabilities.

ONLINE press kits & downloadable images: <http://www.tnaqua.org/News/Newsroom.aspx>