



TENNESSEE
AQUARIUM

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



UNPRECEDENTED

The Aquarium's Leadership team entered 2021 feeling cautiously optimistic that we could continue rebuilding the momentum that was lost during the first year of the pandemic. Yet despite reassuring signs that we were on the path to recovery, the promise of success in the months ahead was anything but certain.

helped ensure we entered and exited the most trying days of the pandemic on more stable footing than many of our peers. We applied the same strategy to 2021, and our team supported this effort by continuing to minimize expenses and make efficient use of resources.

FROM THE PRESIDENT AND BOARD CHAIR

Board Chair Chris McKee left, and Tennessee Aquarium President and CEO, W. Keith Sanford right, prepare to release Lake Sturgeon into the Tennessee River.



Even with a downward trend in Covid-19 cases in our community and throughout the country, we maintained a cautious approach to our operations. Our capacity limits and timed-entry ticketing system were kept in place, and our housekeeping team continued their efforts to ensure our campus was cleaned often and rigorously.

That care and judiciousness was echoed by our financial strategy. In 2020, wise management of our resources and conservative budget forecasts

This measured, cautious philosophy ultimately paid dividends.

Truly, no one could have predicted the trajectory of a year that began on such unstable footing. Despite lingering challenges in 2021, however, we regained much of the ground we lost and celebrated noteworthy advances that reinforced our vital roles as a beloved travel destination, an economic driver, an educational resource and a pillar of conservation science.

REFRESH
REVIVE
REBUILD
REVITALIZE
RESTORE

READY.

REFRESH

Like the animals that call our buildings home, the Aquarium has continually grown in the last 29 years to provide new and different experiences. Whether they were making their first visit or were among our charter members, guests arriving in 2021 found many exciting changes awaiting them in our galleries.



KAPUAS RIVER SPECIES NEW IN 2021

At a time when many still felt reluctant to travel, we began the year by launching a campaign designed to offer guests — whether local, regional or visitors from abroad — the chance to embark on a global excursion without leaving the Chattanooga waterfront.

The Global Passport Program celebrated our amazing living collection by highlighting species from around the world, shifting its focus to a new continent each month. Through on-site activities, live streams and videos, guests gained new insights and appreciation for the huge diversity of animals in our care, from native species like North American River Otters to far-flung exotic residents such as Russian Sturgeon, West African Dwarf Crocodiles and Chinese Big-headed Turtles.

Our exhibit offerings in both buildings also expanded this year.

Guests exploring the River Journey building now can see beautiful fish and reptiles from Borneo in the Kapuas River exhibit. This colorful display served as a much-needed refresh in our Rivers of the World gallery, where it replaced the decades-old Koi exhibit.

We also partnered with the Tennessee Department of Transportation to create a pair of exhibits in support of the Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign. Every year, more than \$19 million is spent cleaning up litter left on Tennessee's roadways, and much of this castoff material washes into local waterways. There, it impacts water quality and contributes to the build-up of microplastics — an issue of growing concern for freshwater scientists. These new exhibits in River Journey employ interactive elements, videos and 3-D printed “trash” to highlight these issues and demonstrate how they affect aquatic life.

In Ocean Journey, visitors can gain insights into an in-house conservation success story — not to mention lay eyes on some adorable juvenile fish — through our new Fish Nursery. The minuscule marine species it displays are raised from eggs collected in our Secret Reef exhibit. Each juvenile fish is the hard-won result of four years of pioneering work to culture and raise our own marine fish. Although extremely difficult to achieve, this process will help minimize our impact on wild populations.



BUTTERFLY GARDEN RESTORATION

Featuring freshly manicured landscaping and more species to encounter, the Butterfly Garden re-opened in November.

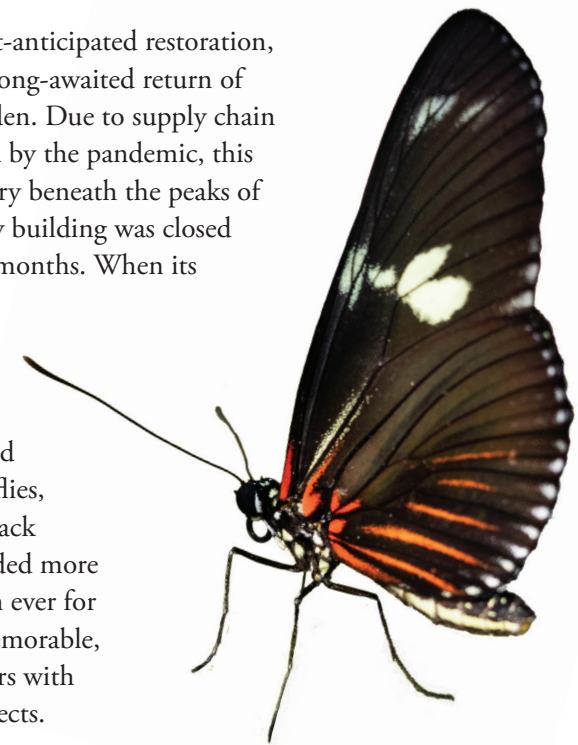
REVIVE

After lying dormant for more than a year, many of our exhibits and signature attractions that were shuttered during the pandemic became operational again in 2021.

Our maintenance team restarted the much-loved fountains on our plaza after extensive renovations to correct issues that prevented them from flowing for years. And guests who lamented the closure of our pop-up exhibits can once more get nose-to-shell with Giant Japanese Spider Crabs or dip below the surf of Vancouver Island's wave-racked coastline.

In 2020, the pandemic's arrival stymied many of our in-person events and educational outreach opportunities. Adjusting our approach in accordance with public health recommendations, we were excited once more to offer many of these programs in 2021, including the AquaScarium celebration and our popular summer camps, which were made possible through a co-hosting partnership with Reflection Riding Arboretum & Nature Center.

The year's most-anticipated restoration, however, was the long-awaited return of our Butterfly Garden. Due to supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic, this lush, tropical gallery beneath the peaks of the Ocean Journey building was closed for more than 18 months. When its doors reopened in November, the Butterfly Garden hosted an even greater number and diversity of butterflies, and its trimmed-back landscaping provided more opportunities than ever for guests to enjoy memorable, up-close encounters with these beautiful insects.



REBUILD

Extensive research, performed by IMPACTS Research & Development, showed that perception of our organization was on the upswing in 2021. The findings from the National Awareness, Attitudes, and Usage Study - believed to be the largest ongoing survey of perceptions and behaviors surrounding cultural organizations in the United States - saw notable improvements to our reputation scores, our role as a trusted source of scientific information and our public perception as an asset to the community. We also saw an increase to guests' overall satisfaction, a metric in which we are ranked among the 99th percentile nationally of our peers.

This invaluable feedback reinforced a belief we've always held: our team members are our most valuable asset.



Keeping our available resources in mind, In 2021 we began to fill new roles, created by the pandemic-induced reduction in force, to tackle current challenges and seize opportunities in years to come.

Since the Aquarium opened, it has served as an important educational destination for millions of students from schools across the nation. Of equal importance, however, are the in-school visits and virtual programs through which our educators bring our expertise and unique animal programming to students who cannot, for whatever reason, make the trip to experience our living collection in person.

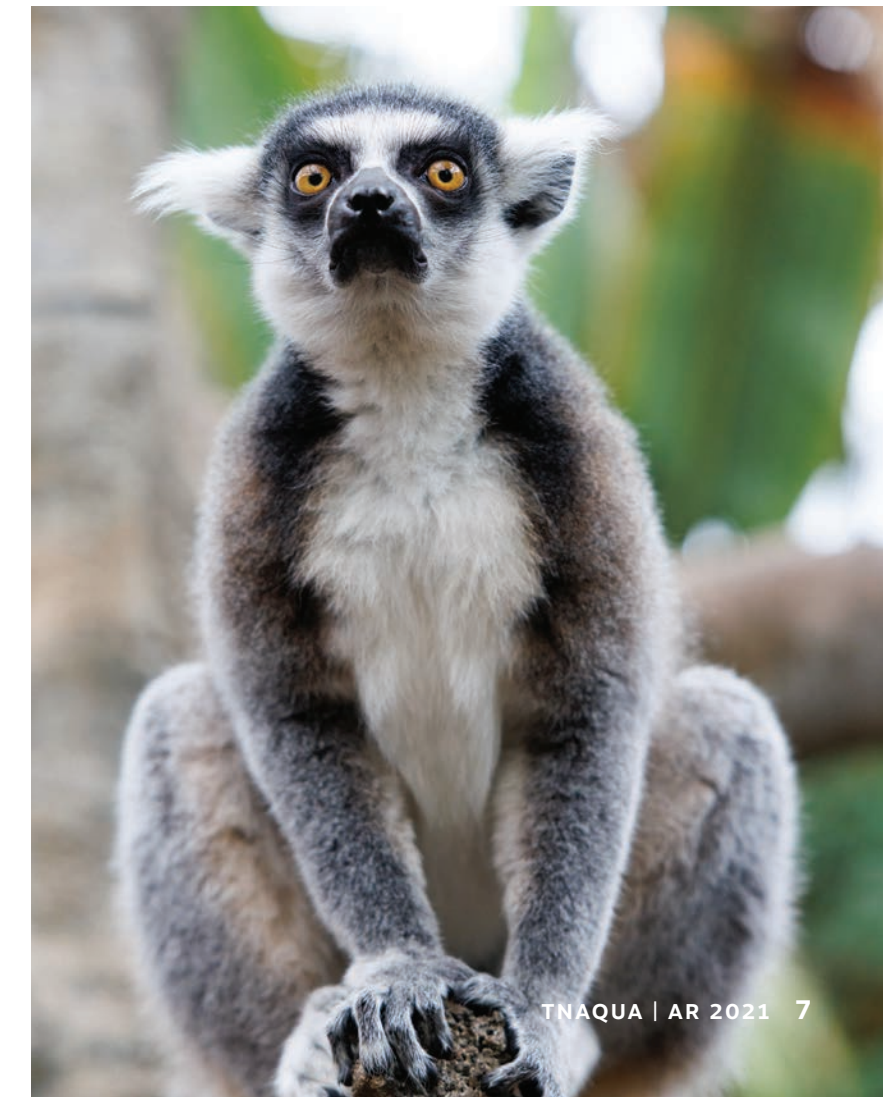
As we considered the needs facing us in years to come, we set about rebuilding our education department with an aim to improve our outreach learning capabilities, especially to underserved communities. Our newly buttressed team of educators — including four grant-funded community engagement specialists — will ensure we are even better positioned to carry on our legacy of sharing the wonders of water and wildlife with new generations of students.

REVITALIZE

For years, feedback we've received from travel reviews has shown that guests notice and value the care with which our campus is maintained, especially for buildings which, in some cases, are approaching their third decade of operation. In 2021, our facilities team was busy tackling a steady stream of renovation and upkeep projects that will ensure our galleries impress as much during our 30th anniversary as when the first guests entered in 1992.

Last year, we polished our main entry portals through extensive renovations of our River Journey building's lobby and members' entrance. These improvements — including new flooring, a massive LED video wall, the installation of new stairs and streamlined admissions kiosks — have modernized the building's aesthetic and ensure visitors enjoy a smooth embarkation on their adventure from the mountains to the sea.

The improvements also carried over to Ocean Journey. Much of Tropical Cove was dramatically overhauled with the launch of Lemur Forest in 2017. Last year, crews installed a non-slip epoxy flooring that makes this popular, sun-filled space easier to maintain and safer to traverse.



**BROOK TROUT
RESTORATION
PROGRAM**

RESTORE

In November, we celebrated the fifth anniversary for the headquarters of the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute (TNACI). Our \$6-million, state-of-the-art freshwater science center opened its doors in 2016 with the ambition to serve as a nexus for our own research and a convening point for our partners in conservation science and other stakeholders throughout the Southeast.

that the waterway we had previously stocked was self-sustaining, we began releasing juvenile Brook Trout into a new Appalachian stream last year. This shift in location was an important step forward in our and our partners' years-long restoration effort.

After pandemic-related interruptions in 2020, we received a new class of juvenile Lake Sturgeon

READY

Our prospects were less than certain at the beginning of 2021, but we ended the year on more solid footing than we could have anticipated.

Thanks to higher attendance, strategic securement of grants and federal relief funding, more operating revenue and lower costs than forecasted, we're financially poised to eliminate our debt in the coming years. This will be a suitably momentous

we will be able to devote even more of our resources to expanding our conservation reach and building new, exciting experiences rather than paying off past investments.

However inconceivable they might have seemed at the dawn of 2021, We are thrilled by the bright prospects awaiting us during our 30th year on the waterfront.



Even during the height of the pandemic, the needs of imperiled native wildlife were undiminished, and the work at TNACI continued largely unabated. The fever pitch of activity continued last year. True to our ambitions, our scientists were involved in a range of projects across the region.

Whether it was snorkeling for elusive darters in Georgia, partnering to save endangered Tennessee mussels or assessing the diversity of aquatic life in a Northern Alabama stream, our conservation scientists left their boot prints throughout the Southeast in 2021.

The year also saw the continuation of our long-term investment in propagation projects to restore native species like the beautiful Southern Appalachian Brook Trout. After seeing signs

in 2021. Most exciting of all, our scientists were able to travel to Wisconsin to assist with the collection and fertilization of eggs from wild-spawning Lake Sturgeon. In the fall, when we celebrated the release of juvenile sturgeon hatched from these eggs, we took just a little more pride than usual knowing we were involved in every stage of their life's journey.

As we pass its first major milestone anniversary, the five-year track record of our conservation science headquarters shows the significant resources we invested in this facility were well allocated. With the tools it affords us, we now are firmly established as standard bearers for freshwater science in the Southeast and well poised to tackle issues of future concern.

turning point for our 30th anniversary, one which will allow us to direct future development efforts from a position of financial strength.

As we look to our needs in the years to come, we now can begin fundraising for success, rather than from behind. The Aquarium has always relied on the support of the entire community, and that will continue to be the case. Now, however,

As we advance toward this next milestone, I look forward to celebrating both the important role we have played in Chattanooga and the legacy of community support that is at the bedrock of our past and future success.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TRUST AND SUPPORT.

Chris McKee
Tennessee Aquarium Board of Trustees Chair

W. Keith Sanford
Tennessee Aquarium President & CEO

NOTEWORTHY 2021

ENHANCING OUR IMPACT BY EXPANDING OUR DIGITAL AUDIENCE

The Aquarium consistently has leveraged technology — from near-field communication and holograms to virtual reality and tweeting Electric Eels — in pursuit of its mission to connect people with nature and inspire them to make informed decisions about water and wildlife.

In 2020, a local production company worked with our award-winning education department to create Science Streams, a series of eight educational videos curated to meet national science standards for K-12 students. Thanks to funding from Tennessee American Water and Unum, this digital helping hand was made available to classroom-bound instructors for free, helping to bring original, engaging freshwater science curriculum to students throughout the nation.

In 2018, we worked with students at Tennessee Tech University to create the Freshwater Information Network (FIN), a kind of “Facebook for fish.” This interactive online database was designed to



offer Southeasterners a fish-eye view of the species with which they share the region’s waterways and to document their own sightings. Three years later, we turned once more to our technological partners at TTU to revitalize and improve the database. Through the students’ efforts, this innovative tool is now easier to use and more appealing to non-academics.

PARTNERSHIPS IN TACKLING MICROPLASTICS

As wide as the Aquarium’s appeal is all on its own, we consistently have relied on partnering organizations to amplify our voice and achieve our mission.

Last year, cooperation with and funding from collaborating organizations helped us raise awareness of a growing concern among scientists: the impact of freshwater microplastics. These near-microscopic fragments of manufactured or eroded plastic increasingly are being found in waterways throughout the world. They are steadily (and stealthily) working their way up the food chain to humans.

In April, we debuted a pair of new exhibits in the River Journey building focused on roadside litter’s impact on waterways.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation funded these new additions supporting its Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign. Through videos, interactive and 3D-printed elements, they raise awareness about the economic and ecological impact the 100 million pieces of roadside litter across the state have on water quality and as a contributor to microplastics.

Our war on microplastics continued in May through a collaboration with Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful. This advocacy non-profit sent the Aquarium eight special receptacles designed to safely recycle the most littered item on the planet and a major contributor to water-bound toxins and microplastics: cigarette butts. These colorful bins help guests safely dispose of their filters, which might otherwise find their way into streams where their plastic weave would unravel and their toxins leech into the surrounding water.





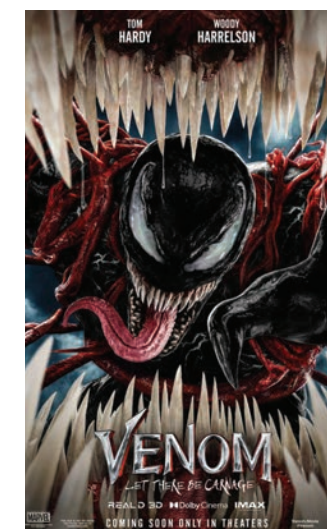
A SILVER ANNIVERSARY FOR OUR SILVER SCREEN

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of the Tennessee Aquarium IMAX 3D Theater. Since opening in 1996, our six-story screen has wowed generations of audiences with its stunning offerings of giant-screen films that have whisked viewers to the outer reaches of space, into the life-filled, teeming waters of the ocean and deep beneath the surface of the Earth.

Five years ago, the theater underwent a dramatic overhaul to implement an IMAX with Laser projection system that catapulted our picture and sound quality to levels unmatched by any facility within 500 miles of Chattanooga.

Audiences in 2021 were able to explore America's hinterland (Into America's Wild 3D), the mysteries of the world's rarest bear (Great Bear Rainforest 3D) and the frozen majesty of the southernmost continent (Antarctica 3D), in addition to special screenings and popular reprisals (Ancient Caves 3D and Flight of the Butterflies 3D).

Our state-of-the-art upgrade began paying even greater dividends throughout the year as our schedule ballooned with an unprecedented selection of in-demand feature films. Film aficionados from throughout the Southeast were willing to travel from far afield to take advantage of the unrivaled quality of our cinematic presentation for first-run appearances of films like:





MANAGING OUR FINANCIAL RESOURCES AN UPDATE FROM GORDON STALANS

Tennessee Aquarium Vice President-CFO, CIO

When attempting to summarize the Aquarium’s financial picture for 2021, the best single word to use is “unprecedented”. The pandemic-induced closure that began at the beginning of our spring break season in 2020 triggered waves of changes that we had never faced before. The Aquarium lost \$11.4 million in revenue in 2020. And through the beginning of 2021, our revenues were down an additional \$1.5 million. Several factors allowed us to turn the tide on a \$13 million deficit that was incurred within 18 months.

Throughout most of the Aquarium’s 29-year history, the only federal support we had received before the pandemic was a few program-specific grants that helped us expand our programming. We applied for the three rounds of stimulus funding through the Small Business Administration that we were qualified to receive: Paycheck Protection Program (1 & 2) and The Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG).

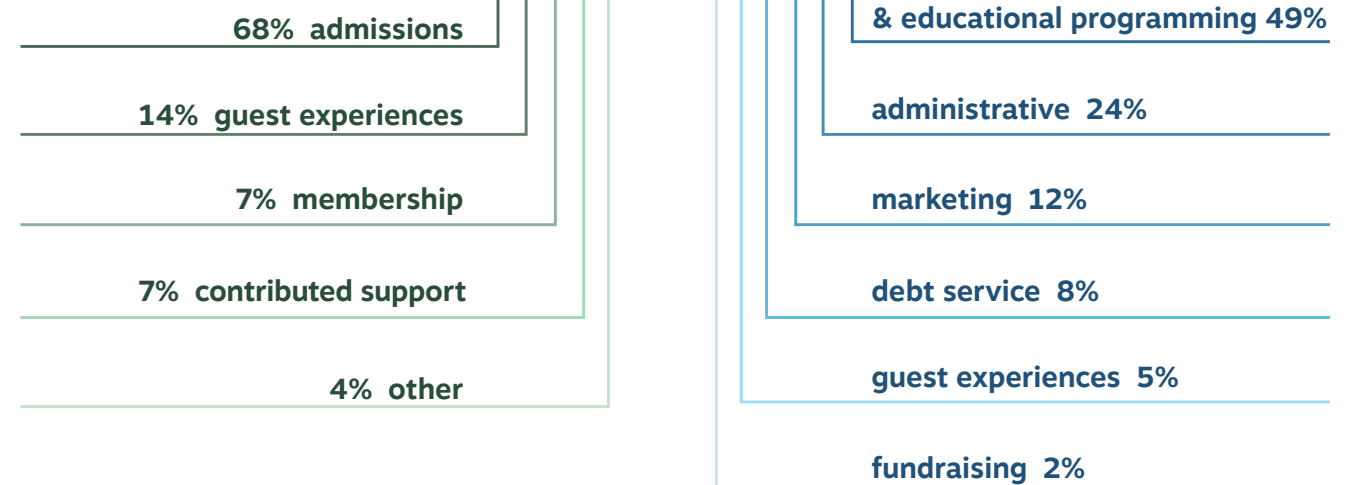
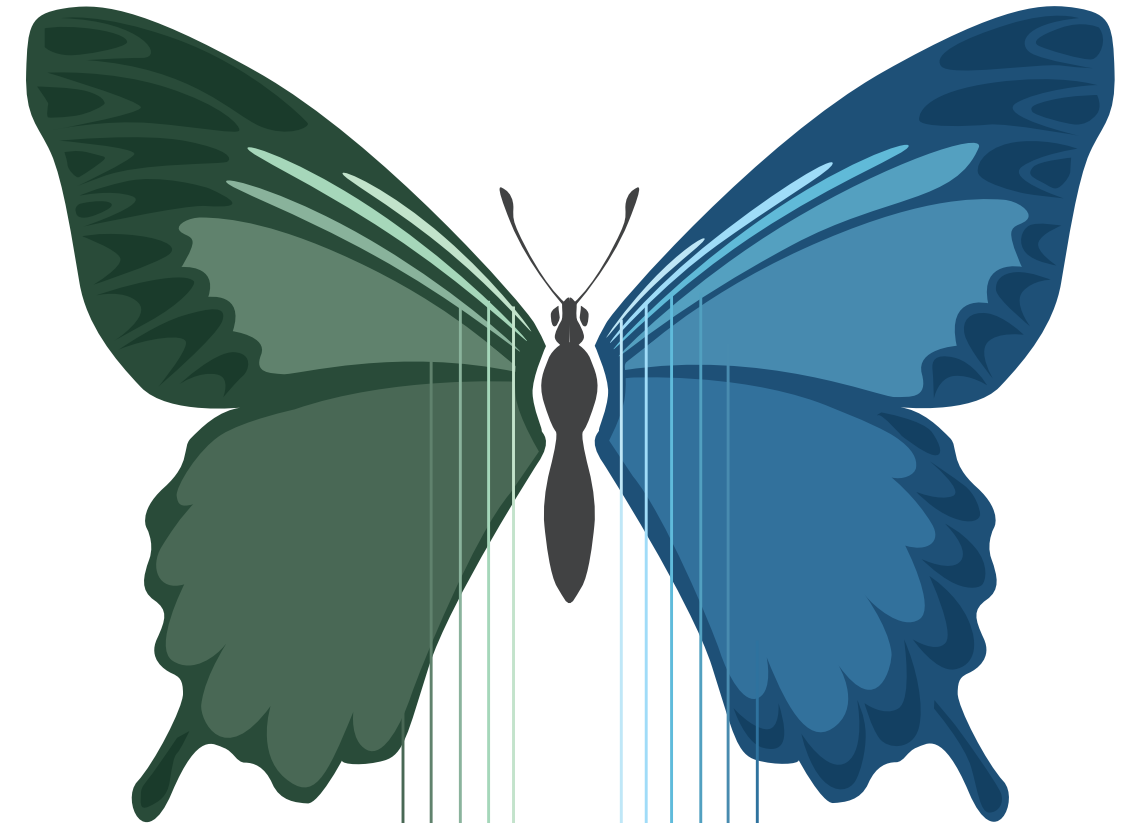
PPP 1 & 2 allowed us to continue paying our employees during our closure and the initial phase of the tourism sector’s recovery. And the SVOG grant funding allowed us to recover a large portion of the \$13 million in losses caused by the pandemic.

We were also grateful for the pent-up travel demand that led to robust attendance in 2021. The attendance forecast, which was developed at the end of 2020, was conservative due to the uncertainties at that time. As the year progressed, we were surprised by the rapid recovery at the Aquarium specifically and Chattanooga more broadly. Attendance at the Aquarium ended the year 26 percent above budget, and IMAX ended up 4 percent above our forecast. This helped push our total operating revenue 48 percent above expectations, leading to an unprecedented positive net cash flow from operations of nearly \$6 million.

2021 FINANCIAL PICTURE

SOURCES
\$25,881,492

USES
\$20,582,866



Complete audited financial statements are available at: tnaqua.org/about-us/financials-and-annual-report

FRIENDS OF THE AQUARIUM 2021

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The Tennessee Aquarium recognizes donors who make a planned gift by welcoming them into the Watershed Society, which ensures the Aquarium's success for future generations.

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THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING DONORS WHO MADE GIFTS TO THE TENNESSEE AQUARIUM IN 2021

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Deborah Williams

THE RIVER SOCIETY

ANNUAL SUPPORT

We are grateful to the following donors who contributed to the Aquarium's Annual Fund with gifts of \$1,000 or greater in 2021.

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Audrey Haywood & David Wallace
Chris & Janel McKee
Scott & Catherine Pierce
Julie & Patrick Stowe
Billy Woodall & Rodney Simmons

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*Deceased

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Aaron & Marie Webb
James & Mary Alice Wyatt
Becky Young

*Deceased

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Recognizing gifts to the Aquarium's Annual Fund of \$500 - \$999.

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Helen Glenn
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Claudia & Darrell Moore
Martha Jane Payne
Heath & Jennifer Ross
Richard & Regina Saas
Frank Trundle
Mary Anne & Rick Williams

The Aquarium appreciates the following companies who support their employees' contributions through matching gift programs.

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Serve & Protect is an evening highlighting sustainably caught seafood and is the largest fundraiser for the Aquarium. Due to the continued impact of the pandemic, the 2021 event was cancelled. We appreciate our sponsors who maintained their support for the Aquarium's important work.

PRESENTING SPONSOR

First Horizon

EVENT SPONSORS

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Cemrock
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SPONSORS

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Vincit Group

Additional support for Serve & Protect was received from these generous companies:

Elliott Davis
Lawson Electric Co.

Our Serve & Protect auction raised over \$28,000 to sustain the Aquarium's operations. We are grateful to the following individuals and organizations for donating items to our online fundraiser.

Thom Benson
Hollie Berry
Buttermilk Kitchen, Atlanta
Sharyl Crossley
Katherine Dickhut
Edwin Hotel
Karen Estes
Kathleen Evans
Dr. Anna George
Kathleen Greeson
Bill Hughes
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The Tennessee Aquarium gratefully acknowledges the following corporations and partners who support our mission and enable us to make a meaningful difference to the economic, educational and environmental well-being of our community.

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103.7 Kiss FM

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Anonymous (3)
Amazon Smile Foundation
Aquarium & Zoo Facilities Association
Association of Zoos & Aquariums
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Benwood Foundation
Columbus Zoo
Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga
The Community Foundation of South Alabama
Conservation Fisheries, Inc.
Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units Network
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World Wildlife Fund

*Deceased

*Deceased



Our staff's commitment to excellence is the primary reason our institution is among the most respected in the nation. We are grateful to the following employees who give over and above their daily service to support our mission.

Jackson Andrews
Thom Benson
Thom Demas
Gene Dwyer
Rodney Fuller
Dr. Anna George
Christian Keller,
D.V.M.
Melanie King
Jill McCain
Julie Piper
Meredith Roberts
Keith Sanford
Gordon Stalans
Aggie Stephenson
Mary Anne Williams

20+ YEAR VOLUNTEERS

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James Bardoner
Bill Burch
Jola Burch
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Zelta Tinkham
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Darlene Cole
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Eugene Dwyer
Alaine Rivers
Gordon Stalans
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Jill McCain
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Mark Craven
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FULL-TIME STAFF 30+ YEARS

Peter Burman
Jackson Andrews
Christine Hunt
Rodney Fuller
Mara-Lynne Payne
Diane Hanson
Christian Keller,
D.V.M.
Kevin Calhoon
David Gilreath



**Deceased*

**Deceased*



IMPACT IN THE COMMUNITY

In 2021, more than 668,700 visitors created \$135.7 million in revenues for Chattanooga business. Out-of-town visitors generated additional revenue throughout the community — eating at restaurants, staying in hotels, visiting other attractions, and purchasing goods and services from Chattanooga proprietors.

Since opening, the Aquarium's economic impact on the community has been \$4.88 billion from direct, indirect and induced spending by visitors who reported their primary reason to visit Chattanooga was the Tennessee Aquarium.



**TENNESSEE
AQUARIUM**

CHATTANOOGA RIVERFRONT • TNAQUA.ORG

The Tennessee Aquarium connects people with nature and empowers them to make informed decisions about water and wildlife. Thank you for your continued support.

Planned gifts help ensure a world-class Aquarium experience for future generations to enjoy.

Contact Melanie King at 423-785-4038 to learn more about joining *The Watershed Society*.

We also offer FreeWill – an online estate planning service. This tool is provided to Aquarium supporters for free.

www.freewill.com/tnaqua