



TENNESSEE
AQUARIUM

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



2025—ANOTHER GREAT YEAR

2025 was another important year for the Aquarium’s Board of Trustees, beginning with the successful recruitment of a new CEO after a nationwide search. Andy Wood brings a wealth of aquarium experience, vision, and energy to successfully lead the organization into the future. He also possesses a collaborative spirit that will allow him to quickly connect with existing community partners and forge new alliances to drive innovation.

In 2025, we made great strides in our goals from the previous year — returning our attention to a strategic plan, making sure the organization is better prepared for disaster readiness and response, and committing to expand our board. We’re also committed to working with Andy and his team to bring the Tennessee Aquarium into more prominence across the state and region.

The Aquarium welcomed more than 784,000 guests and enjoyed another excellent year financially. Conservation and education milestones were also achieved. As Board Chair, I can state with confidence that the Aquarium is set up for long-term success.



Scott Pierce
Board Chair



There is no other place I would rather be than the Tennessee Aquarium. This past year, I was honored to be selected as the fifth President & CEO of the Tennessee Aquarium. For years, I have observed the Aquarium's successes and waited for the opportunity to join this incredible organization.

In March, before officially beginning my tenure as CEO, I was eager to join the team in Palm Springs, California for the Aquarium's accreditation hearing at the AZA Mid-Year meeting. In receiving its sixth consecutive 5-year accreditation, the Aquarium was praised for excellence in conservation, education, guest experience, and financial stewardship. It was also given high marks for animal wellbeing and encouraged to amplify its role as a steward of animal health. The challenge made to us by the accreditation commission became the first leadership opportunity we would pursue, starting on day one when I met with our veterinarian, Dr. Chris Keller. Dr. Keller and our team have risen to the challenge. Following months of discussions, research, and meetings with regional partners, we now have a comprehensive vision of animal health that will be anchored in a new, state-of-the-art animal hospital, the addition of new veterinary expertise, and long-term partnerships with

institutions of higher learning designed to shape the next generation of animal care professionals.

We have also embarked on a strategic planning process designed to clarify who we are today and set the vision for our future. Already, we've heard from our employees, supporters, and community stakeholders who have echoed what I already knew about this incredible organization — the Tennessee Aquarium's transformational legacy is central to Chattanooga's identity. Our team takes great pride in our culture of hospitality, freshwater animal expertise, proven conservation and education outcomes, fiscal stewardship, and community trust. Everyone contributes to an atmosphere of mutual respect and shares a drive for making positive change — both internally and throughout our communities.

My excitement to lead the Tennessee Aquarium isn't just because this is a great organization with a tremendous legacy. I'm thrilled because we are incredibly well positioned to explore new opportunities that will be deeply impactful for generations to come.

Andy Wood
President & CEO

CONSERVATION

WE ARE ADVOCATES FOR FRESHWATER AQUATIC LIFE

From speaking out for a species declining in silence to celebrating major conservation milestones with our partners, we are standard bearers in the fight to protect the Southeast's vast biological abundance. On the strength of that reputation, we are elevating Southeastern ecological issues to a national level.



With the return of late winter rain, we released more than 200 endangered Laurel Dace back to the streams from which we rescued them during a severe drought in 2024. Alongside representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, we reintroduced these beautiful minnows in time for their spring spawn, ensuring one of North America's most imperiled fishes persists for another generation.

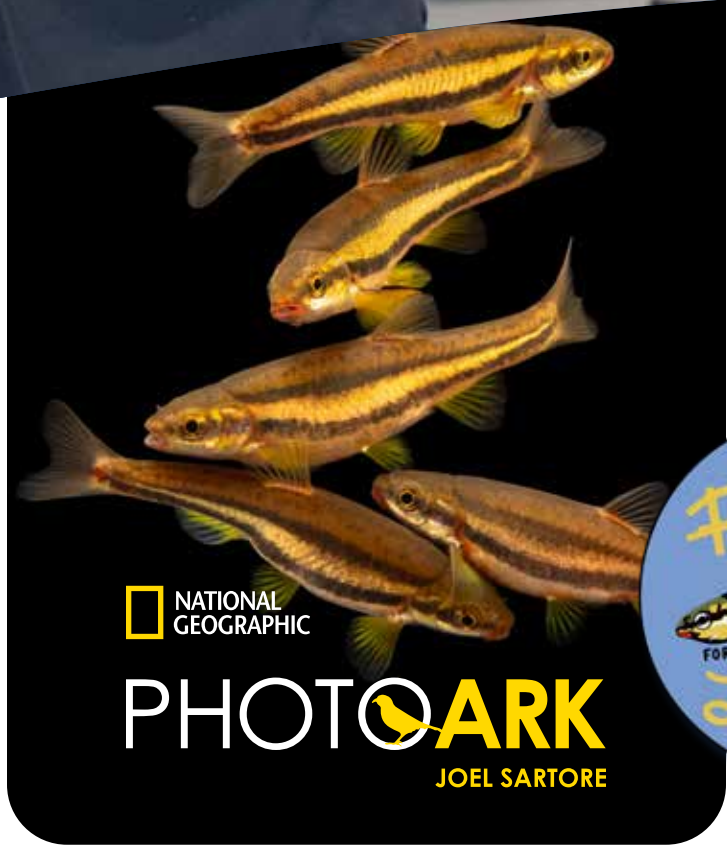
We hatched more than 200 juvenile Laurel Dace at our freshwater science headquarters in 2025. These babies are the offspring of about 50 adults residing in our care as an ark population.





Award-winning National Geographic photographer Joel Sartore has long supported our conservation efforts, particularly of smaller species that might otherwise be overlooked. He visited in 2025 to photograph Laurel Dace for inclusion in Photo Ark, his 19-year project to create portraiture of all species in human care.

On May 16, we helped organize the first Laurel Dace Day celebration in Spring City, Tennessee, just a few miles from the last streams where this species can still be found. In addition to a 5K race, live music, and a farmer's market, visitors learned about our work to save the Laurel Dace directly from our scientists and educators. In all, this event raised more than \$14,000 to support our Laurel Dace recovery effort and made national headlines through coverage by The Weather Channel.



The Aquarium's work to protect and raise public awareness of the endangered Laurel Dace earned numerous accolades in 2025.

Tennessee River Basin Network's River Champion Award for Outreach and Education

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2024 Recovery Champion (Southeast Region)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southeast Regional Director's Honor Award



In 2025, we helped direct \$1.35 million to fund 30 projects through the Ridges to Rivers Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This more than doubled the 14 projects that were funded in 2024.

During our third year co-administering the Ridges to Rivers Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), we conducted outreach at more than 30 events. These appearances reached about 55,920 people, including state legislators in Nashville during Ag Day on the Hill. Lawmakers representing the program's targeted counties pledged to raise awareness among their constituents of this tremendous economic resource to fund watershed-friendly land improvements.



In March, we visited a site in Middle Tennessee's Elk River watershed to release more than 125 endangered Barrens Topminnows alongside partners from Conservation Fisheries, Inc., and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



In March, Aquatic Conservation Biologist Dr. Bernie Kuhajda returned to Uzbekistan to continue his search for the Syr Darya Shovelnose Sturgeon. This species hasn't been seen in more than 60 years, but Dr. Kuhajda plans to continue his search in upcoming years.

This winter, our biologists and field technicians continued their work with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, mapping spawning sites for the federally threatened Trispot Darter. During our second year in the project, we spent three months using environmental DNA filtration and light detection and ranging (LiDAR) scanning to pinpoint where this imperiled fish could be breeding.



Since helping to found the Southeast Lake Sturgeon Working Group in 1998, we have been integral in restoring this ancient species to Tennessee's waterways. Beginning in July 2000, raising and releasing baby Lake Sturgeon has been a focal point of our conservation work.

This April, our conservation scientists participated in the collection and fertilization of eggs from wild-spawning sturgeon in Wisconsin. While there, they assisted the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources with data collection on the state's healthy wild Lake Sturgeon population.

In June, hundreds of fry from those collected eggs arrived at our freshwater field station, where they spent months in the care of reintroduction specialists. In October, we celebrated our 25th year of Lake Sturgeon reintroductions with a public release of 500

A GOLD MEDAL SILVER ANNIVERSARY



baby sturgeon into the Tennessee River alongside invited officials, community leaders, and dozens of students from Hixson High School.

Together with our partners, we have reintroduced more than 430,000 sturgeon into the Tennessee and Cumberland River watersheds to date.

The program's silver anniversary this year was made even more momentous by a pair of exciting recent developments.

Based on the size and health of the Lake Sturgeon population currently in Tennessee's waterways, the species' state conservation

status was officially downlisted in 2025 from endangered to threatened. This improvement speaks to the long-term stamina and dedication of the working group members who, decades ago, committed to bringing this native species back.

Finally, state wildlife managers were excited to find a gravid (egg-bearing) female Lake Sturgeon during routine population monitoring. Lake Sturgeon are a long-lived, slow-to-mature species, and finding fertile adults suggests the reintroduced population may finally be on the cusp of becoming self-sustaining.

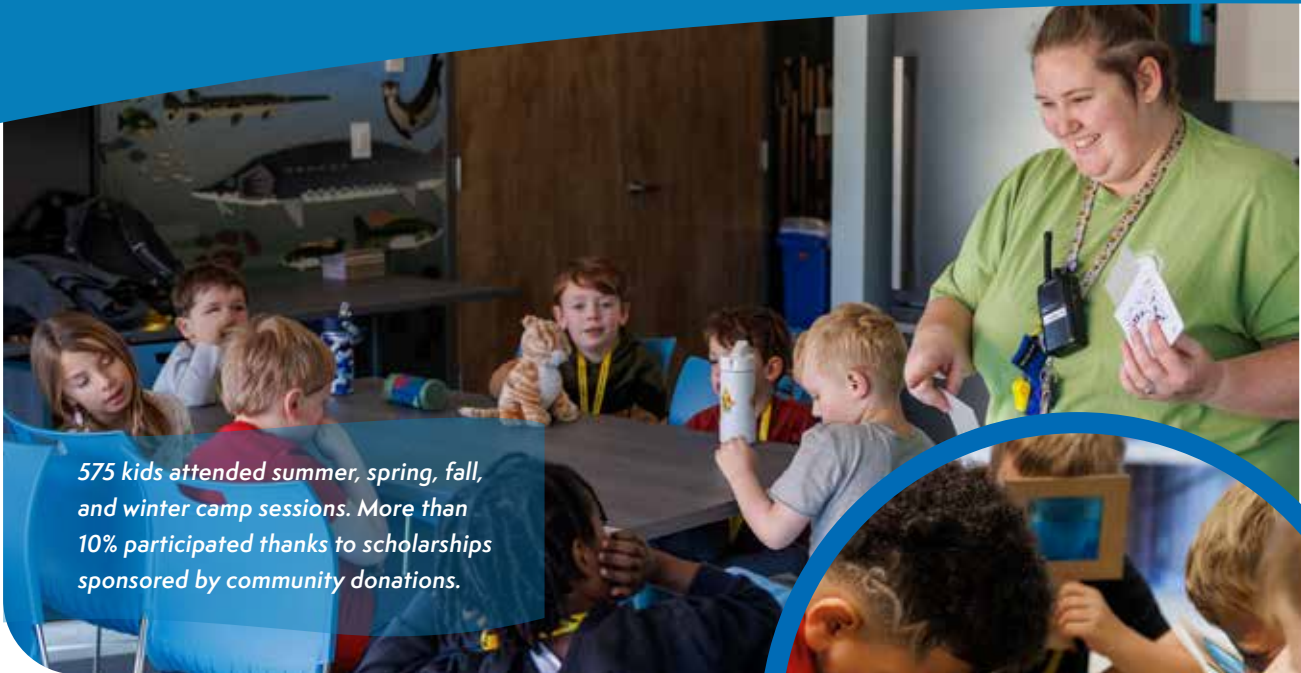


The first Sturgeon release July 2000.

EDUCATION

WE ARE CREATING FUTURE GENERATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

For 33 years, we have served as a tremendous educational resource to our community and a gateway to the natural world for millions of visiting students. Whether we're virtually presenting to schools, creating lifelong memories for campers, or helping teachers expand their skill set, our educational impact is vast and varied. We are committed to continually investing in and expanding this core pillar of our organization.



575 kids attended summer, spring, fall, and winter camp sessions. More than 10% participated thanks to scholarships sponsored by community donations.

Our outreach educators reached students near and far in 2025. Through on-site and virtual programming, we served more than 14,000 students across 100 organizations, including visits to 32 Title I schools (some on multiple occasions). We also offered professional development opportunities to more than 40 educators.





Volunteers serve a huge variety of roles at the Aquarium, from preparing food and welcoming guests to presenting educational programs. In 2025, 315 volunteers contributed 24,579 hours to our operation. This combined service was worth an estimated \$823,000 (at \$11.82 per hour).



More than 56,000 students visited the Tennessee Aquarium during the 2024-2025 academic year.

Mary Holland (pictured above) and Beverly Kriewald have continually volunteered at the Aquarium since our doors opened in 1992.



In 2025, we hosted more than 60 Sleep in the Deep overnights, including five families and three birthday parties.



In November, we gathered with community leaders and sponsoring partners on the Aquarium Plaza to celebrate the grand opening of the S.T.R.E.A.M. Learning Center, supported by Unum. Much like the arrival of our conservation science headquarters in 2016, S.T.R.E.A.M. will amplify our capabilities by consolidating our educational resources under one roof. With a trio of classrooms adorned by vibrant, life-filled murals created by our art team, this facility will provide an inspiring learning environment for future generations of students and educators.



Our educators hosted a pair of workshops in 2025 focused on the importance of pollinators. One of these included spending time planting literal and figurative seeds in the name of conservation as part of Keep Soddy Daisy Beautiful's pollinator garden project.



Following the program's revival in 2024, the River Teachers freshwater science workshops returned this summer. Many of the teachers who participated came from schools located within the watershed targeted by the Ridges to Rivers Regional Conservation Partnership Program. In addition to on-site professional development, participants went on field trips to learn freshwater science data-collection techniques and experience the rich biodiversity of area waterways firsthand.



GUEST EXPERIENCE

WE ARE AN AQUARIUM FOR EVERYONE

We strive to inspire everyone to have an informed appreciation for the natural world. In service of that mission, we seek to open doors and explore new opportunities, to experiment, to learn, and — whenever possible — to remove barriers so we provide the best experience to the broadest possible audience.

In October, our lifetime guest count passed 29 million with the arrival of the Lee family from Tupelo, Mississippi. Team members, including President & CEO Andy Wood, welcomed them enthusiastically and hand-delivered a gift package to commemorate their milestone visit.



Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant, co-host of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom: Protecting the Wild (NBC), visited the Aquarium to tour our conservation science headquarters, meet with summer campers, and take part in a river cleanup. Later, she offered inspirational testimonials to our class of summer fellows about her career path and not accepting arbitrary limitations in the pursuit of excellence.

THE PODCAST AQUATIC

During its first full year of operation, *The Podcast Aquatic* passed a milestone of 10,000 listens. These in-depth conversations are reaching a younger demographic and provide staff and volunteers with additional insights into all aspects of the Aquarium's mission.

We continue to be celebrated as one of the nation's leading aquariums:

Best Local Tourist Attraction
(18th consecutive year)

Chattanooga Times Free Press Best of the Best Awards



2025 Traveler's Choice Award

Tripadvisor



Five Aquariums Across the U.S. To Check Out

Forbes

No. 2 Best Aquarium

Newsweek Readers' Choice Awards

No. 6 Best Aquarium

USA Today's 10 Best Readers' Choice Awards

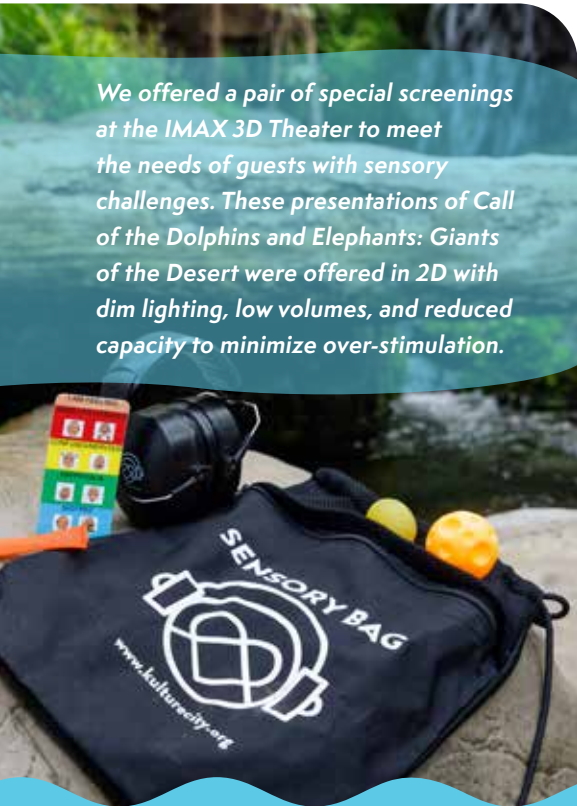


Our Jim Hill Fellowship program is a paid, work-based learning opportunity offering hands-on skill development to conservation-minded students from under-represented communities. This year, we added a new fellowship focused on water quality and attracted a vibrant cohort of 11 participants from as far away as Texas and West Virginia.

This year's Serve It Up live cooking show fundraiser and online auction raised more than \$133,000 to support our nonprofit mission.



We offered a pair of special screenings at the IMAX 3D Theater to meet the needs of guests with sensory challenges. These presentations of *Call of the Dolphins* and *Elephants: Giants of the Desert* were offered in 2D with dim lighting, low volumes, and reduced capacity to minimize over-stimulation.



In 2018, we became the first attraction in Tennessee to be certified as sensory-inclusive through KultureCity. Through staff education and facilities modifications, we ensure we are equipped to support the needs of guests experiencing — or caring for others who experience — sensory challenges such as autism, low vision, or post-traumatic stress disorder. This year, more than 270 staff members completed sensory training as part of our continuing commitment to improving accessibility at the Aquarium.

We kicked off 2025 by announcing our participation in the Institute of Museum and Library Services' Museums for All program. We join 1,400 institutions nationwide in offering reduced admission to guests receiving temporary assistance benefits. In its inaugural year, more than 30,000 people visited us thanks to this access program.





About 2,000 people visited us in 2025 through non-profit community memberships and Hamilton County's library pass program. Memberships are made available to local non-profit organizations serving families of limited financial means or special needs and to programs serving at-risk individuals or under-resourced communities.



This spring, we formed a task force to improve the overall guest experience. Based on the team's suggestions, we placed greater emphasis on hospitality and increasing staff interactions with guests. This strategy had an immediate, marked impact. Scores for staff/volunteer knowledge and availability hit record or near-record ratings — some up 10%, year over year — through the second half of the year.



Whether in person or virtually, we hosted numerous special guests to help launch new giant-screen films at the IMAX 3D Theater this year, including:

Greg "Boss" Woolridge,
former Blue Angels commanding officer
(Blue Angels 3D)

Tim Greer,
underwater filmmaker
(Call of the Dolphins 3D)

Laura Roddy,
education manager at
The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee
(Elephants: Giants of the Desert 3D)

Cristina Zenato,
dive specialist and shark behaviorist / ecologist
(Shark Kingdom 3D)

We continued to explore ideas for new guest experiences in 2025. Our slate of programs targeting adults included five after-hours events, all of which sold out: Fish & Sips, Ottortoberfest, After-hours: Holiday Cheers, and a pair of Nightlife Events (Love Languages of the Ocean and Something's Fishy).



ANIMAL CARE

WE ARE EXPERTS IN ANIMAL WELLBEING

Our living collection of more than 13,000 animals has a vital role in our mission to form bonds between the public and the natural world. Whether an animal came to us from another facility, just hatched, or is a long-time resident, we place their care and wellbeing above all else.



In late May, we welcomed a “very vocal” Gentoo Penguin chick to Penguins’ Rock. He was later named “Tater” by the winning bidder in our online fundraising auction. Tater

is the offspring of first-time parents Carla and Bigfoot, who were also born here. His arrival captivated our social media followers and attracted national media coverage.



We're proud to have maintained continuous accreditation through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for 32 years. In March, we earned accreditation once again following an exhaustive examination by visiting inspectors. Meeting or exceeding our industry's "gold standard" speaks to our team's commitment to excellence and is crucial in maintaining public trust in our animals' quality of life.

Our corps of Ambassador Animals got a lot cuter — but surprisingly not any smellier — with the arrival this year of Brie, a Striped Skunk.



We were delighted to welcome Kintana, a female, Red-collared Brown Lemur, this spring. She arrived in Lemur Forest by way of the Dallas Zoo. Her curiosity and bravery reinvigorated her new companion, John, who was left without critical social stimulation after the loss of his mate, Jessie, in early 2024.

More than 1,100 turtles hatched at the Aquarium between 1992 and 2023.
This year, we added 10 more hatchlings from four species, including:



2 Beal's Four-eyed Turtles
(endangered)



2 Central American
Wood Turtles



3 Four-eyed Turtles
(critically endangered)



4 Serrated Forest
Hinge-back Turtles

After years in our Boneless Beauties gallery, we relocated our Giant Pacific Octopus to the Island Life gallery. This all-new, brighter exhibit was funded by a generous private donation and state funding to make a much-loved species even easier to see and appreciate.



The Rivers of the World gallery underwent several notable improvements this year, including updated signage and a trio of new or improved exhibits. These latest additions offered better views of secretive aquatic caecilians and introduced guests to a Chinese Big-headed Turtle and a bustling community of Shell-dweller Cichlids.

In July, we hosted Turtle Survival Alliance's 23rd Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles. We have a long-standing partnership with the Alliance, a global leader in protecting turtles.



River Journey's Ridges to Rivers gallery received several updates this year, including interactive displays funded by a grant from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture featuring activities focused on water quality. The gallery also added an exhibit showcasing freshwater mussels, which exist in our home state in unparalleled abundance.



This year, we joined the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Saving Animals From Extinction Freshwater Mussels program. Our scientists and aquarists now have access to additional grant funding as they collaborate with other AZA facilities to conserve mussels and educate the public on their role in cleaning our waterways.



REINVESTING

WE DRIVE FUTURE SUCCESS THROUGH WISE STEWARDSHIP

This year marked the milestone 20th anniversary of the Ocean Journey building, which continues to awe and inspire hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. In this, we see the benefits of timely maintenance and upgrades to our facilities. A cautious, proactive approach to prolonging the life of our most valuable assets ensures more resources can be directed toward mission-critical programs, projects, and expansions that will drive future growth.

This year, team members from all departments attended a tabletop exercise at the Hamilton County Emergency Operations Center. Alongside first responders and representatives from local hospitals, we conducted a mock

response to a fictional disaster on our campus. This exercise was an opportunity to critically examine and refine our protocols to ensure we are prepared to act swiftly and efficiently to safeguard our staff and guests.

Our elevators are one of the most important means to navigate our buildings. This year, we began a project to modernize these vital conveyances, starting with the staff elevator in the River Journey building. The update replaced every major component, which should improve reliability and prolong the life of this hard-working equipment while diminishing downtime and the frequency of costly repairs.

Following a revamp in 2024, the refreshed gift shop and concessions area in the IMAX 3D Theater's first full year of operation was a success. It generated an additional \$110,000, year over year.



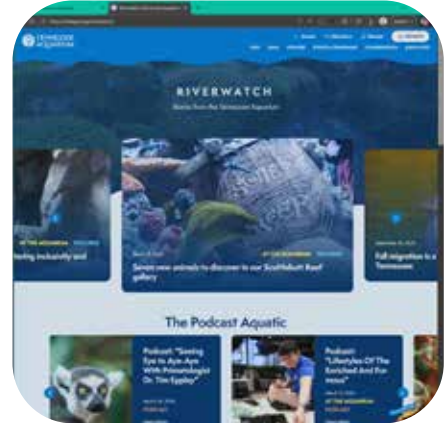
Our facilities team proactively replaced the condenser and chillers that serve water systems in the River Journey building. This timely update was enacted before our operation could be disrupted by equipment failures and has improved water flow and energy efficiency.

At our off-site Animal Care Facility, we replaced both air handlers. The new units exclusively use external air to condition this vital holding facility rather than recirculating moist, salt-rich internal air. This could double equipment's operational lifespan from 11 to 20 years and minimize corrosion-related degradation.



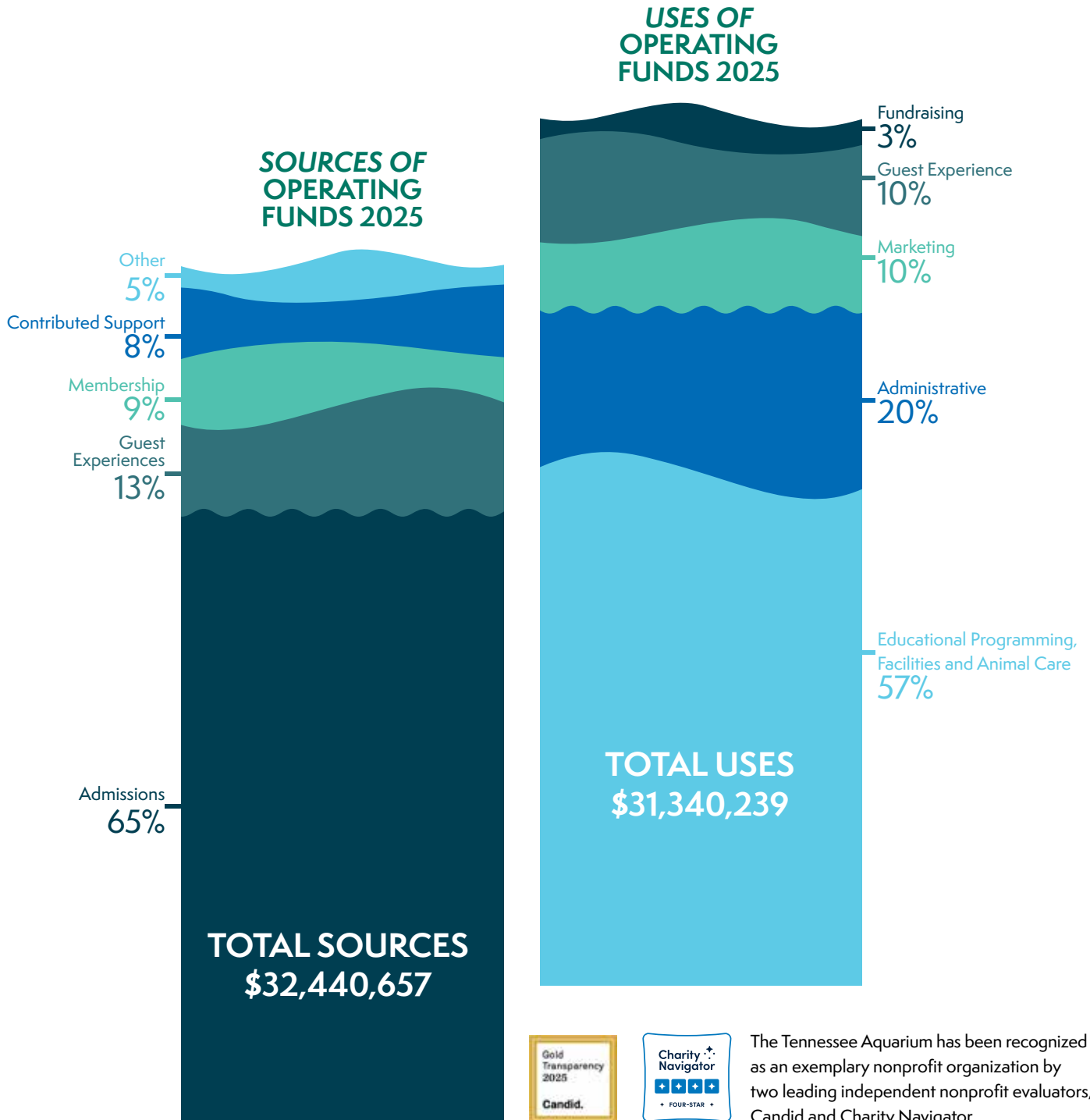


In October, we launched the first major update to our website since 2020. This comprehensive overhaul — which also transformed our Riverwatch digital magazine — emphasis accessibility and a visitor-friendly user experience. Visitors now have access to a chatbot for immediate answers to common questions, and the aesthetic is both playfully organic and multimedia rich.



Director of Information Technology Peter Burman was hired in 1990. Last year, he became our first employee to celebrate his 35th work anniversary at the Aquarium.

DRIVING SUCCESS



The Tennessee Aquarium has been recognized as an exemplary nonprofit organization by two leading independent nonprofit evaluators, Candid and Charity Navigator.

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

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Thank you to the following donors who made gifts to the Tennessee Aquarium in 2025.

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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 contributed to the Aquarium's Annual Fund with gifts of \$1,000 or greater.

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 Charitable Foundation
 Caterpillar
 Draper Corporation
 First Horizon Foundation
 Lyndhurst Foundation
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Serve It Up is a special culinary fundraising event for the Tennessee Aquarium. Serve It Up 2025 was made possible by:

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 First Horizon

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 Chattanooga Land Company

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 The Baldwin Group
 Trudy Harper & Roger Knipp
 Tennessee Valley Authority
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TENNESSEE AQUARIUM
ONLINE AUCTION

The Tennessee Aquarium Fall 2025 online auction raised over \$40,700 to support our Annual Fund. We thank the following individuals and organizations for supporting the auction through winning bids and/or donating items.

Agave and Rye
 Lauren Alaina
 Marya Ashby
 Mariska Baeke Chung
 Tony Bakken
 Jeff Beaman
 Misti Benansky
 Deni Bettis
 Lucinda Bolt
 Jessica Bookout
 Sheryl Brannan
 Bridgeman's Chophouse
 Regina Brown
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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 our community's economic, educational, and environmental wellbeing

Ace Hardware
 AEED
 American Cruise Lines
 Alt 98.7

Astec Industries
 Athens Distributing Company
 Ben & Jerry's Chattanooga
 Black Creek Living
 Burger Republic
 Coolidge National Medal of Honor Heritage Center
 Chattanooga Coca-Cola Bottling Company
 Chattanooga Gas Company
 Chattanooga Land Company
 Chattanooga Times Free Press
 Chattanooga Tourism Company
 Children's Hospital of Erlanger
 CommonSpirit-Memorial Hospital
 Culligan Water Systems
 DoubleTree by Hilton Chattanooga
 Downtown
 Eagle Mechanical
 Electronic Controls
 Embassy Suites by Hilton Chattanooga
 Hamilton Place
 Empire Distributors
 EPB Fiber Optics
 First Horizon
 Food City
 Groove 93
 Hilton Garden Inn Chattanooga
 Downtown
 Hits 96
 iSustain, Inc.
 Komatsu America
 KZ 106
 Lawson Electric
 Local 3 News
 March Adams & Associates
 McKee Foods
 Mellow Mushroom
 Downtown Chattanooga
 Miller & Martin
 Miller Industries
 New Country 107.9
 Oddstory Brewing Co.
 Opella
 Phoenix Air
 Power 94

*Deceased

Reagan Outdoor Advertising
 Regions Bank
 River City Company
 Signal Voice and Data
 Siskin Steel & Supply
 Snap Dragon Shop, LLC
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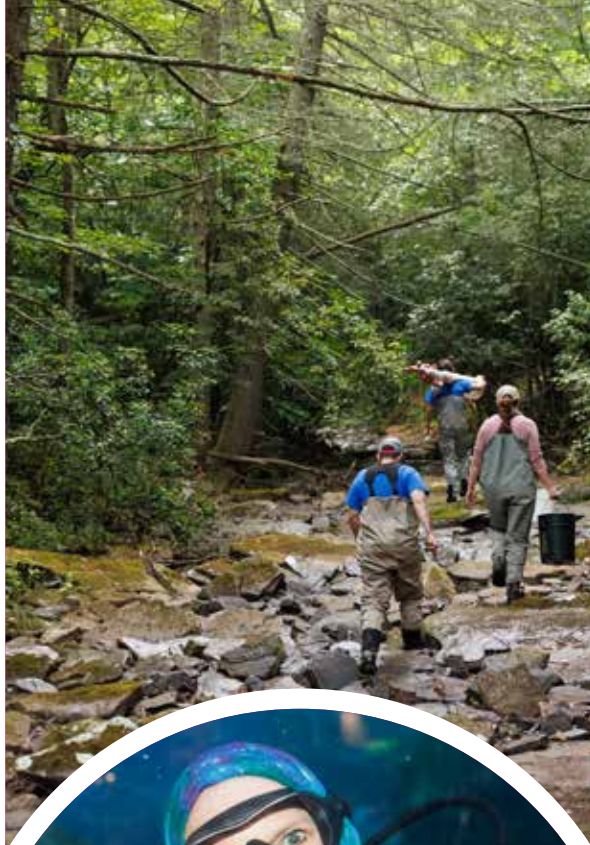
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