

Ocean Explorium to move to Buttonwood Park Zoo



The Ocean Explorium Board of Governors has begun a fundraising campaign to support the transfer of its programs and assets, including the Science on a Sphere® exhibit, on permanent loan from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, to the Buttonwood Park Zoo, where they will continue to serve as integral components of educational programming.

A three-phase fundraising campaign, led by the Ocean Explorium, will be necessary to support the move. In the first phase, funds raised will cover the cost of moving the Science on a Sphere® exhibit to the Zoo's Education Center. In the second phase, funds raised will pay for Aquatic Center renovations, required before the Ocean Explorium's marine exhibits can be moved. The third phase will raise funds for a new Pavilion at the Zoo to house the Ray and Shark Touch Tank, a very popular feature of the Ocean Explorium.

The Board of Governors is hopeful that friends of the Ocean Explorium, as well as the community at large, will support this fundraising campaign to establish a permanent home and

sustainable future for the programs and exhibits that New Bedford and the SouthCoast has come to love.

The Ocean Explorium will close the public hours at the end of business on Sunday, August 31, in order to prepare for the transition. According to Ocean Explorium Executive Director Abbey Spargo, "We hope our friends will take advantage of this opportunity to see their favorite exhibits and our beautiful Union Square location before the move. Many thanks also to the Buttonwood Park Zoological Society for generously extending membership to current Ocean Explorium members at the Buttonwood Park Zoo. The memberships will be honored beginning September 1 and continue until their regular expiration date."

While public hours at the downtown facility will cease on August 31, special programs – field trips, group visits, birthday parties and outreach experiences – will continue through the Fall. Educators and others interested in these programs are encouraged to book their visits now to take advantage of special incentives.

Ms. Spargo continued "We have earned a reputation for delivering high-quality, informal science education to learners of all ages and abilities in the region. Since the Ocean Explorium opened in 2008, 200,000 guests have visited, including more than 35,000 students and their teachers in field trips. We are pleased to move to the Buttonwood Park Zoo to bring these programs to an even greater segment of our local community as well as to the Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island region."

Keith Lovett, Director of the Buttonwood Park Zoo stated "We are excited to collaborate with the Ocean Explorium to bring their respected science education programs and ocean exhibits to the Zoo. The combined efforts of our two conservation focused organizations will result in educational benefits for the entire community."

Ocean Explorium staff will begin to prepare animals and equipment for the transition, although some may need to be put into storage during a retro-fitting of the Zoo's Aquatic Center. Ms. Spargo stated that "the integration of the educational programs will be more easily accomplished, and therefore will be done first. We hope for a seamless transition into the new academic year of field trips and group visits."

According to Ms. Spargo, "A classroom in the Zoo's Educational Center will require a few adjustments to accommodate the Science on a Sphere®" It is our goal to move the Science on a Sphere® by the end of this year and to transition the high quality educational programs, in collaboration with the Zoo, as soon as possible. The hard part will be leaving Downtown New Bedford. We have formed special relationships here, not only with our non-profit partners, but with residents and those who work in the shops and restaurants. We have loved being downtown and will miss our current location but are thrilled to be entering into this new phase and working on a permanent home for the Ocean Explorium's educational programs and exhibits. The Buttonwood Park Zoo is the number one regional tourist attraction and sees a yearly attendance at least six times larger than the current Ocean Explorium. To have so many additional visitors engaging in the Ocean Explorium's programs and viewing the exhibits is one of the most exciting and compelling reasons for this transition."

Current and former staff members, volunteers and friends of the Ocean Explorium are invited to post favorite memories on Facebook. Ms. Spargo added that "This venture is an exciting new step; in essence, the Ocean Explorium is graduating...moving from one phase to another. Thank you to our donors, visitors and families in the region. We look forward to seeing you at the Zoo."