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Museum Founders

*Harry Wason, Mary Sherwood Holt
and Lois Bowman*

– then and now



Celebrating 50 YEARS

BY PAGE HAYHURST, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Virginia Living Museum (VLM) is celebrating 50 years! Our anniversary plans are worthy of this incredible milestone – special programs, speakers, events and a new permanent outdoor exhibit.

From Jack Hanna, Big Bugs and Dinos to Garden Fest, Raptor Day and a Wildlife Art Show, there are special programs and exhibits for everyone. Even our fundraisers are diverse – from the Enchanted Otter 50th Anniversary Masque to the Golden Boot Scootin' Party. We invite you to join the celebration!

It's hard to believe it was 50 years ago that the community came together to create the Peninsula Junior Nature Museum, as the VLM was named then. Led by museum founder Harry Wason, the Warwick Rotary Club and the Junior League of Hampton Roads raised funds and partnered with the City of Newport News to create a museum to teach children

and families about the natural world. Our mission of connecting people to nature to promote conservation is still relevant and vital today.

It all began with the planetarium opening in November 1965. It was the era of the space-race and our state-of-the-art planetarium was designed to encourage future astronauts and inspire wonder about the night skies. That also included showing the “Star of Wonder” – now a family tradition for many families who have come back again and again to the Abbutt Planetarium and to our free monthly star observing at the Abbutt Observatory.

The VLM was built, beloved and sustained by the community over the past 50 years. Our year-long celebration will give back to the community through partnerships and special programs and create new reasons to visit and join for adults, children and families.

A COMMUNITY EFFORT FROM THE BEGINNING

BY PHOEBE DOTY, VOLUNTEER

Since 1966 the Virginia Living Museum has brought the cute, crawly, creepy and even Cretaceous to the Hampton Roads community. Through indoor and outdoor exhibits, traveling attractions and educational programs, the museum has spent the past 50 years teaching visitors about the beauty and science of Virginia.

The vision of a nature center in Newport News began with Harry Wason, a leader in the Warwick Rotary Club, who planted the seed and watched it grow into a legacy.

In August 1963, Wason connected with Mary Lou Hatten, the president of the Junior League of Hampton Roads, to talk about his interest in establishing a children's nature museum. With the Junior League on board, Wason also sought support and funding from the Warwick Rotary. Together these local groups raised \$150,000 to build a nature center in Deer Park on 21 acres leased from the City of Newport News.

As a non-profit, the museum relied heavily on the dedication of its volunteers from day one. Just like today, a team of volunteers supported every facet of the Peninsula Junior Nature Museum and Planetarium.

Walking into the small brown building in the woods that was the Junior Nature Museum and Planetarium in 1966, you'd be greeted by a taxidermied bald eagle in the museum's lobby. With staffers and volunteers ready to highlight the key exhibits, you'd circle through the museum's attractions, and maybe stop by the planetarium for a look into the heavens.

Visitors learned about Virginia wildlife through dioramas and interactions with living creatures. Exhibits devoted to plants and animals native to Virginia included taxidermied animals. The museum also housed an animal care facility for injured wildlife.

Families and school tours lined up to go on the guided walks through the nature trails behind the museum, taking in Virginia's wildlife in Deer Park.

A shop facility, constructed by the Warwick Rotary Club, was added in 1968 and later converted into an aquarium exhibit in 1970. It included a 3,000 gallon freshwater tank and a 700 gallon saltwater tank, home to fish found throughout the state.

With donations from local organizations, in 1976

the museum built a 7,000-square-foot addition, room for programs in physical and applied sciences. With the expansion came a new name, the Peninsula Nature and Science Center, and accreditation from the American Association of Museums (AAM).

Bringing tech to kids, in 1981 the Junior League of Hampton Roads pledged \$25,000 to create a Curiosity Corner with hands-on exhibits that featured computers, a robot, a mock television studio and mechanical hands used in handling radioactive and other materials. Another expansion project in 1981 added new classrooms, science exhibit halls and a large lobby.

LIVING MUSEUM

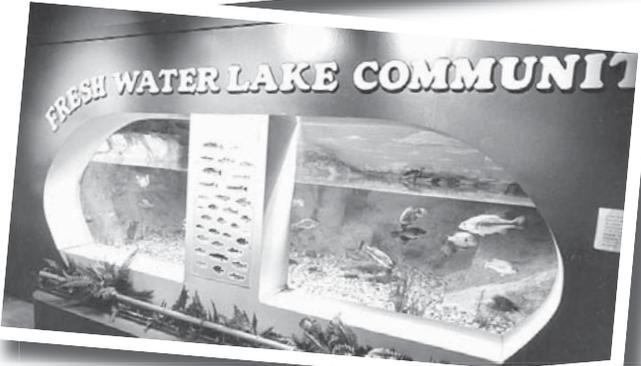
Attendance continued to climb, reaching the limitations of the existing facility, and in 1983 the museum began a study of long-range plans. Approval was given to the concept of becoming a "living museum," modeled after the renowned Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum in Tucson. This would combine aspects of a science museum, botanical garden, zoological park, nature center, aquarium and planetarium.

To accommodate the new concept, the museum underwent a \$3.2 million renovation in 1986 and reopened as the Virginia Living Museum in 1987.

By the mid-1980s, four Peninsula school systems were on contract for the museum to provide 60,000 students with curriculum-enhancing programs. In the early 1990s the museum also launched a series of in-school programs designed for kindergarten through fifth graders. In 1991 alone, staff reached out to more than 30,000 children in their schools.

The museum provided a safe home for creatures who couldn't survive in the wild, including bald eagles with wing injuries. In 1991 it opened an outdoor wetlands aviary, and otters delighted visitors when they gave birth to two pups.

A huge crowd-drawer were robotic dinosaur exhibits. First displayed in 1989, these stomping, growling dinosaurs brought Virginia's ancient wildlife back from the Jurassic. Animatronic dinosaur exhibits continue to be popular summer attractions. "Dinosaurs are an integral part of our mission," says Executive Director Page Hayhurst. "Over the past 27 years of dinosaur exhibits, the museum has built expertise, collections and partnerships to provide our community with a natural history resource like no other."



The museum inaugurated its first annual fund drive in 1992. In that first year, community leaders, led by David L. Peebles, chairman of Ferguson Enterprises, set out to raise \$105,000.

Since its inception, the museum has been committed to preserving animal species, especially those that are endangered. In 1998 it welcomed the black-footed ferret, the most endangered mammal in North America. It also started working with Monarch Watch, a program that tracks the millions of monarch butterflies that fly from North America to Mexico each winter.

MAJOR EXPANSION

With attendance again reaching the building's limits, in 1997 the museum announced plans to build a \$21 million museum complex on the existing site. This expansion would multiply the museum to four times its size.

Local companies, including Ferguson Enterprises and Newport News Shipbuilding, donated more than \$600,000 to the cause. And the museum hosted unique fundraising events to support its annual funding. In October 1999, Charlie and Mari Ann Banks hosted "Boots for Bucks," a fun hoe-down themed auction that offered celebrities' boots for the highest bidder.

The first phase of the expansion, a \$400,000 Coastal Plain Aviary, opened in 2001. The following year the museum broke ground for its new 62,000-square-foot facility. An elevated boardwalk was built along with new animal habitats. In 2003, the endangered red wolf went on exhibit, adding to the museum's animal sanctuary.

The museum opened its new building on March 28, 2004. The building's permanent galleries represent different regions of Virginia, including Coastal Plain, Piedmont and Mountain, Virginia underground, World of Darkness, Cypress Swamp and Appalachian Cove. A renovated planetarium now boasts a state-of-the-art digital full-screen projection system.

In 2009, the museum was awarded accreditation from the Association of Zoos

and Aquariums (AZA), becoming one of only 12 institutions in the country to be accredited by both AZA and AAM.

Over the past decade the museum has continued to add amenities including a café, Conservation Garden, amphitheater, Children's Garden and new exhibits, such as the interactive Wild and Well where young kids can role play being an animal keeper and a veterinarian.

The museum has also faced some challenges recently, both physically and financially.

When the museum's construction note was called as part of the nation's financial crisis in 2008, the community rallied, raising \$3 million to pay off the debt by the Dec. 31, 2009, deadline.

In 2012, flood waters rushed through the museum's doors twice in four months, causing more than \$500,000 in damage. Repairs were designed to minimize the effects of future floods and Newport News Shipbuilding designed new flood gates to better protect the building.

Despite floods and financial woes, what began as a little brown building in the woods has expanded to encompass 26 acres of scientific learning, interactions with animals and family fun. Thanks to 50 years of support from the community, its dedicated volunteers and its passionate employees, it continues to be a hub of learning for visitors of all ages.



Photo by Sally Holzbach

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Photo by Wendy Nelson

Planetarium Looks to the Sky

BY KELLY HERBST, ASTRONOMY CURATOR

December 1965. The United States was sending combat troops into the Vietnam War. A Charlie Brown Christmas aired for the first time on CBS. NASA's Gemini program was in full swing, preparing astronauts to land on the Moon three and half years later. And the Peninsula Planetarium opened as the first available experience at what would become the Virginia Living Museum.

The designers of the original museum responded to the space mania of the time, and included a planetarium as part of their nature and science center. During the 1960s, many new high schools got a planetarium, as space science was seen as the wave of the future. But including a planetarium in a nature center was a bold visionary leap forward. The prominence of the planetarium project helped shape the concept of the museum as we know it today – a center where the entire natural environment of Virginia can be experienced – right down (or perhaps up!) to a simulation of the starry skies.

The technical capabilities of the theater have grown and changed with the times. Our first show in December of 1965 was “Star of Wonder,” an hour-long live presentation, using only an astronomer and the optomechanical planetarium instrument installed in the theater. Over time, many new capabilities were added, including slide projectors of every type and variety, computers for automation, special effects built in-house, and soundtracks provided first by cassette players and eventually as part of DVD projection. Those early computers? Apple IIe's. They continued to provide automation for the theater until the early late 2000s.

IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION

Other capabilities grew as well. Photographic, video and audio production suites were constructed in the astronomy offices to allow for in-house production of fully automated planetarium shows. Even as the shows became more complex, they became shorter, finally settling into today's 30 minute time frame. Yet, even as we focused on

automation, we knew the most important part of the planetarium theater was then, and remains today, the people.

Today, our planetarium theater is all digital. Computers run everything, from the sky simulation to the soundtracks, still images and videos. Our capabilities are greater than ever. Our video and audio production facilities continue to grow and improve. Plus, digital storage allows us to have virtually an unlimited number of shows ready to go at all times. Where once a visit to the planetarium meant seeing the one show available that day, today our guests can often choose from three or more shows, each offering differing types of topics and engagement, meaning everyone can find something they enjoy.

TOPICS EXPANDED

Topics vary widely, allowing us to explore even more of the natural world, including space, the oceans, the human body, planetary science,

geology, biological science and environmental science. We continue to look to the future, as we hope to upgrade and expand the planetarium theater's capabilities even further.

And yet, none of this is possible without good people and good storytelling. The Abbitt Planetarium has been fortunate to have many planetarians over the years who were truly masters of their art. We strive to continue this tradition. In the end, the power of the museum is the power of a connection with people who are passionate about the world in which we live and the universe that surrounds it. And that passion all began 50 years ago with a planetarium instrument and a dream. Here's to the next 50 years.



Congratulations



"Kinyo is honored to have been a part of Virginia Living Museum's 50 years of giving wonderful, educational experiences to the children and adults of our community. We wish them continued success for another 50 years!"

— Mr. Kazuo Nakamura,
President of Kinyo Virginia, Inc.

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Molly and Moe Otters

Every Animal has a Story

BY PHOEBE DOTY, VOLUNTEER

When George Mathews first met Moe, now one of the Virginia Living Museum's famous otters, Moe only swam in a baby pool and rode around in a wagon. Rescued as a pup after his mother was killed by a boat propeller, Moe spent some time with a Virginia family, but as he grew up it was clear that this wild animal was not a pet.

And that's when the Virginia Living Museum got involved.

"The animal imprinted on myself and one of the other staff members here so we had

to become its new parents," said Mathews, curatorial director and 35-year museum veteran. When Mathews brought the otter to join the museum, Moe had to learn how to adapt to surroundings better suited for a wild animal.

"Since it had never been in anything bigger than a kiddie pool and a bathtub it didn't know how to really swim that well," explained Mathews, who had the unique experience of teaching the otter how to dive and swim in the otter exhibit. "The first day the otter went on exhibit I actually had to get in the water and splash

around with it a little bit. It adapted very quickly and now it's doing fine."



JOURNEY TO THE MUSEUM

Animals come to the museum from all backgrounds and make lasting memories with staff, volunteers and visitors. Just like the otter Moe, many of the animals come to the museum for a safe home and to help educate the museum's 200,000 yearly visitors.

It's certainly true that every animal has a story, and one of the museum's great animal storytellers is George Mathews.

"As Curatorial Director I'm supervising the day-to-day operations of the curatorial department, which includes 250 species and about 1300 animals," said Mathews.

Each animal's journey to the museum is unique, and they arrive with some exceptional back stories. Like Moe the otter, some animals join the museum after being improperly kept as pets. Others come looking for a safe home after being injured in the wild or after their natural habitats are disturbed.

"We'd never take a healthy animal from the wild, it's always an animal that has some special story or special needs that can't survive on its own," explained Mathews. "There are birds that have lost an eye or a wing so they can't be released to the wild but can be a great ambassador for the species."

One prime ambassador is also one of Mathew's favorite animals. Chesapeake Chuck, the local celebrity woodchuck, is famous in Hampton Roads for his annual Groundhog Day event.

"Chesapeake Chuck came from a lady up in the western part of the state who was a licensed rehabber who works with woodchucks," he said. After treating the woodchuck for an ear infection, the rehabber realized that Chesapeake Chuck had become too used to people to survive in the wild.

"She donated him to the Living Museum," said Mathews, "and now Chesapeake Chuck comes out for Groundhog Day and other special events. We bring him out as a program animal and I can hold him and scratch his head and hand-feed him. He does great around people so he's a great educational animal."

Mathews now has a special relationship with this friendly woodchuck. "I took over the parenting of the animal when he came in," he said. "Chesapeake Chuck is really food motivated so if you bring him out and feed him pecans and carrots or broccoli he'll sit there and eat the food and you can actually scratch his head—he's the only animal we have that you can touch while you feed him."

HOME TO THE ENDANGERED

Some of the most fascinating animals at the museum are rarely seen in the wild. The museum works with several organizations and agencies to support endangered animals.

One such animal is the loggerhead sea turtle. Listed on the Endangered Species Act as a threatened species, these animals face exploitation for the oil, meat, shells and eggs and can be entangled in nets.

To help boost the loggerhead population, the museum watches over a loggerhead for a few years and then releases it with a radio transmitter to track the turtle's movement in the Atlantic Ocean.

In October 2015, the aquarium staff released the sea turtle Abe who had lived at the museum for four years. Using the tracking device, the museum can see where Abe and the other released sea turtles swim.

When working with sea turtles or any animals on the Endangered Species List, the museum must take some extra lengths to provide a safe environment.

"We need special permits to keep endangered animals like the Roanoke log perch and the short-nosed sturgeon and the red wolves," explained Mathews. "Whether it's as small as a three-inch fish or a 60-, 70-pound wolf, you need to meet all the standards and requirements to display these endangered animals."

The museum has three red wolves—a father and two sons—that they support by providing a habitat and care.

For Mathews, working with threatened and endangered animals definitely has its rewards.

"When I started first working here back in the '80s the bald eagle was a protected and endangered animal and the numbers were way down," said Mathews. "Being here 30 years or so, it's been gratifying to see how an animal's status in the wild has changed. Now the bald eagle has gone from endangered to threatened. It's still protected but the animals are making a great comeback."

INTERESTING CHARACTERS

Typically when an animal comes to live at the museum it will be trained as a program animal or placed in an exhibit. One such skunk used to be a party animal at a popular college town.

"We have a skunk right now that was roaming the streets of Charlottesville and I think some of the UVA kids were feeding it," said Mathews. The interactions with people made the skunk friendly, too friendly to survive in the wild. "We realized it couldn't make it on its own—it was looking for handouts from people. It's one thing to be friendly, it's another thing to be able to hold it and walk around with it and use it in an educational program."

ANIMAL AMBASSADORS

Whether on exhibit or in the education program, all the animals at the Virginia Living Museum have a special story to tell. They come from displaced habitats, people's homes or rehabbers. But no matter what their story is, they all help

"Red wolves are actually an endangered species and ours are owned by the federal government," said Mathews, "so we aren't really allowed to have any direct contact with them—we can't hand feed them." These wolves could be released back into the wild to grow the population so they need to remain wild even in captivity.

educate visitors about the importance of conservation.

"The museum is a unique facility because by providing homes for these animals as ambassadors it's a great opportunity to educate people about native wildlife, natural habitats and conservation all mixed into one," said Mathews.



George Mathews with Chesapeake Chuck, WAVY-10 meteorologist Jeremy Wheeler



Loggerhead Abe getting a pat on the back goodbye

“We’d never take a healthy animal from the wild, it’s always an animal that has some special story or special needs that can’t survive on its own”



Museum Involved in Conservation

and analyze/categorize spat settlement samples from artificial oyster reef structures in Dr. Burke's lab and assists in the construction of artificial oyster reefs. In a field project led by the Nature Conservancy, volunteers, students and VLM staff place concrete castle blocks to raise oyster reefs above the sediment and closer to the surface to accommodate for rising water levels.

The museum has a oyster castle reef display with live fishes and invertebrates that normally colonize healthy reefs.

LINED SEAHORSES

The museum breeds lined seahorses on site as part of AZA's Species Survival Plan (Association of Zoos and Aquariums SSP) program that coordinates with other AZA facilities across the country to manage and conserve wild populations. Captive breeding has provided the VLM with enough seahorses not only to display for many years to come, but with a surplus of animals that they have sent to several other facilities around the country. The VLM is also a research partner and contributor to a genetic study run by researchers at Florida Institute of Technology. The museum provides DNA samples (a 2mm fin-clipping) from wild sea horses in our local waters – which are released unharmed - to help researchers determine the population structure of lined seahorses throughout the East Coast.

RED WOLVES

The endangered red wolves on exhibit at the museum are part of the Species Survival Plan in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and AZA to maintain captive and wild populations of red wolves within the Alligator River Wildlife Preserve.

The red wolves at the VLM are available for targeted breeding programs to AZA facilities across the country to help build and maintain a sustainable population of healthy red wolves. The VLM is also a member of the Red Wolf Coalition, which advocates for the preservation of wild red wolves and helps foster conservation of native habitat.

LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE

The VLM collaborates with North Carolina Aquariums to care for and raise juvenile loggerhead sea turtles. Female loggerheads nest along the beaches of coastal North Carolina each summer. These nests are federally protected and continuously monitored by a network of volunteers and institutions; weak or disoriented hatchlings are collected to be nursed back to health at the North Carolina Aquariums and their partner institutions. The vast majority of the hatchlings that are collected are released as soon as they are healthy and strong enough to survive in the wild, while some are raised at facilities across the country, including the Virginia Living Museum. They are then returned to North Carolina, affixed with satellite tags and released back into the wild. These lightweight tags are attached to the turtles' shells and transmit a signal each time a turtle surfaces, indicating their exact location and providing much needed data regarding their movement and migratory behavior. The data is free to the public on www.seaturtle.org

MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

Each fall, the museum rears, tags and releases adult Monarch butterflies that have

been raised at the museum to learn more about their amazing migration to Mexico. The museum also educates the public on how to provide food and habitat for these fascinating insects. Monarch Fest [first Saturday in October] is a public program that celebrates Monarchs and other butterflies and includes displays of live butterfly life stages, tagging demonstrations and mass releases of monarchs raised both off and onsite.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS

FrogWatch USA is AZA's flagship citizen science program. The museum currently hosts a FrogWatch USA chapter that trains volunteers from around the area on how to identify local frog and toad species based on their call. That information is recorded as part of a nation-wide citizen science collaboration.

The North American Amphibian Monitoring Program (NAAMP) is another national survey that monitors frog and toad populations. As the current State Coordinator of the program, Herpetology Curator Travis Land manages all of the volunteers, monitoring routes, and data that is collected in Virginia.

The VLM is a certified Virginia Green attraction, committed to minimizing its environmental impacts by preventing pollution wherever feasible in its operations. Also, the museum promotes conservation to its visitors through the Goodson Living Green House, solar displays, Conservation Garden and use of native plants throughout its exhibits and grounds.

Precious oysters, endangered sea turtles, rare red wolves – these are among many creatures being helped to survive and thrive by the Virginia Living Museum's conservation efforts.

In the tidal flats of the Chesapeake Bay, off Virginia's Eastern Shore, an oyster "castle" reef is being raised. The VLM Aquarium staff contributes time and effort on oyster spat settlement research conducted by Dr. Russ Burke and Christopher Newport University as well as helping an effort to rebuild and revive dead oyster reefs led by the Nature Conservancy.

As Aquarium Curator Chris Crippen explains, castle-shaped concrete blocks are stacked up to raise the surface of a dead reef, making it a hospitable oyster habitat again as sea levels rise. Revitalizing reefs goes beyond meeting the demand for oysters as a prized food. Oysters filter the bay's waters, and their reefs minimize coastal erosion and provide habitat for other animals and plants. "Oyster reefs are critical to the success of coastal marine ecosystems," Crippen writes in his VLM blog, "yet their populations have been depleted due to overfishing, dredging, habitat loss and pollution."

Staff uses "field conservation days" to collect



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Larry Riddick

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Museum Has Always Relied On Volunteers!

BY PHOEBE DOTY, VOLUNTEER

Since its inception, the Virginia Living Museum has had more volunteers than staff members. Today, there are nearly five volunteers to every one staff member, and these dedicated individuals support every aspect of the museum.

“Volunteers make the museum go,” said Shandran Thornburgh, director of volunteer services since 2003. “We wouldn’t be able to open our doors without them.”

From designing the first exhibits to preparing food for today’s animals, hundreds of volunteers sacrifice thousands of hours each year to support the museum.

“What do our volunteers do?” said Thornburgh. “Maybe you should wonder what they DON’T do! Our volunteers are involved with most of the departments and operations that work daily to keep our grounds looking beautiful, our animals cared for and our museum staffed.

“Our mornings begin very early. Our first set of volunteers (Animal Care Trail openers) come in around 7:30 a.m. and assist our dedicated animal care staff feeding and caring for numerous animals throughout the trail exhibits. In rain, snow, heat and humidity our volunteers distribute the diets to our animals; clean enclosures and ensure each animal is healthy. Our behind the scenes animal care volunteers are equally as dedicated and hard working – coming in at 9 a.m. and preparing diets, cleaning cages and safely handling each animal in their care.

“Every day our museum is staffed by an army of volunteers ready to educate our guests on new and existing exhibits. As you walk through the trail, the Children’s Learning Garden and other outdoor areas – you will find a dedicated volunteer, prepared to show you around and help in any way they can. Throughout the day our indoor exhibits, museum store and information desk support our museum staff in offering first class customer service to our guests.”

Today the museum has 467 active volunteers, with numbers surging to around 500 during the summer. To be considered active, volunteers must come in at least once a month. Many, however, have a regular schedule and volunteer several hours a week.

VOLUNTEERS ARE VALUED

The museum wants to ensure that volunteers know how much they are valued. Volunteers are recognized for their dedication and service at an annual banquet. Volunteers also earn free passes to the museum and receive discounts at the café and museum store.

Beyond the perks, volunteers gain so much from their time at the museum. “They come away with knowledge,” Thornburgh said. “We’re willing to teach them and they come away with some actual skills and things to put on a resume. They meet new people and hopefully make new friends.”

For students, volunteering at the museum

offers opportunities for education and even future careers.

“Seeing a junior volunteer really find their passion and then decide they want to go into some conservation-related career field is exciting,” said Thornburgh. “Then you know you’ve had an impact.”

VOLUNTEERING INCREASING

Some high school students dovetail their museum hours with school research projects. “There was a student a couple years ago who did a study in horticulture on which plants filtered the most pollutants,” Thornburgh explained. “After graduating, students can even turn their volunteering into a career at the museum. In fact, nearly 42 percent of the museum’s current staff began as volunteers.

Over the past decade Thornburgh has seen an increase in volunteers of all ages. “One of the catalysts is that many schools are requiring hours. Even colleges are requiring service hours for students in many of their classes. And for college students, the collective good is more in the forefront of their minds than when I started here in 2003, so I think people are more aware of social issues and are more willing to serve.”

Jacob Andrews has been a junior volunteer for two years. “I always associated the Virginia Living Museum with volunteers,” Andrews said. He chose to volunteer after visiting as a guest with his family.

Sabrina Kight, an adult volunteer, appreciates the opportunity to work with animals and children. As a volunteer in the herpetology department, she cares for some of the animals on exhibit.

“In herpetology we clean out the tanks and I actually prepare the foods for the box turtles and the salamanders,” she explained.

What began as a visit to the museum two years ago has become a regular routine for Kight. “I fell in love with it so the next day I called and I’ve been volunteering ever since,” she said.

Kaitlyn Durr has been with the museum since she was a high school student, with this summer marking her fifth year. Working first as volunteer, then a Volunteer Services Intern, she says “volunteering at the museum has been an educational experience. I have learned not only information on various biology and conservation topics, but also interpersonal and public speaking skills. In many ways, my experience volunteering at the Virginia Living Museum was my first real job training and is an experience I will cherish forever.”

For volunteers like Andrews, Kight and Durr, the museum provides the opportunity to learn about subjects they’re interested in.

“We’re willing to teach people so you don’t have to come in the door with knowledge already,” Thornburgh said. “If you’re really interested in the red wolf, for instance, you can train for the outdoor trail and share your knowledge.”

“The people that are here are just really fabulous,” Thornburgh said. “The volunteers are great.”

In September 2015, the museum and its volunteer program completed a year-long process to become certified by Points of Light as a Service Enterprise Initiative. “This hallmark signifies that we embrace a culture of volunteerism throughout the museum and particularly leverage the skills volunteers bring to the museum,” said Thornburgh.

The museum is governed by a board of 23 trustees, led by President Rolf Bartschi, Vice President, Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) Carrier Construction, Newport News Shipbuilding. Thirty-seven community leaders also provide expertise as members of the Board of Advisors.



Wilner Nelson and Shandran Thornburgh

Science is hands-on

“Science is something you *do*, not something you read in a book.”

So says Chris Lewis, who worked at the Virginia Living Museum for 21 years before retiring as its education director in 2014.

“At the VLM, science is taught the way it should be taught -- hands-on.”

That’s been the museum’s approach ever since its education program was established nearly 30 years ago to teach Virginians young and old about their state’s natural wonders.

The education department was created in 1987 as the original Peninsula Nature and Science Center was transformed into the Virginia Living Museum. Then-Museum Director Bob Sullivan and Education Director Pete Money had ambitious plans.

“We borrowed from other living museums to make a hybrid facility,” Money explained. “A program for everybody,” as well as for school children.

The museum signed contracts with local school systems for kindergarteners through high schoolers. For the general public, there were activities and even trips. “We didn’t want to leave anybody out,” said Money. “This was a big bite to chew.”

The museum wouldn’t be just a field trip destination, “but rather an off-site lab and field area that is an integral part of the school,” said Fred Farris, who was the museum’s first curator of school education and is now its deputy director.

“The Virginia Living Museum’s school programs are conducted in the museum’s classrooms, lab and planetarium, in the field, and as outreach programs in school classrooms,” explained Lewis. Every year schools throughout Virginia benefit from these programs, all taught by professional educators.

Educators use live animals and items from the museum’s collections to teach interactive lessons. And they work with both public and private schools to design grade-level targeted science programs that align with students’ curricula and Standard of Learning (SOL) tests. These programs

are endorsed by the Virginia Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation.

“We developed and led naturalist excursions every month to wild sites in Virginia and beyond so that adults and families could learn about nature first-hand,” Lewis said. These safaris even included visits to Alaska, Cape Cod and the Amazon rainforest.

Today, the museum’s public outreach program connects with parent-teacher associations, day-care facilities, retirement communities and more. A couple of times each year, homeschool families enjoy a line-up of the museum’s educational resources.

EXPLORE THROUGH THE SENSES

Always, the emphasis is on hands-on learning, giving students the ability to explore science through the senses. For example, students studying the paleontology of the Chesapeake Bay area may have the opportunity to physically examine and measure a 7-inch-long giant shark tooth fossil. In a mineralogy lab, they determine the specific gravity of a topaz sample. While studying animal survival adaptations, students may examine real bird bones and observe up close the anatomical adaptations of a live owl

“For people to come to truly care about the natural world and to become a steward of the environment, they must experience nature first hand,” Farris said. “The VLM’s educational programs are critically important for this region where many children grow up in inner-city situations where they rarely have a meaningful encounter with nature.”

The museum’s educational role will only grow more important in the future, said Farris, “as natural areas become more fragmented by urban growth and society’s increasing need for natural resources.



Thank you Virginia Living Museum and staff for many years of happiness and education you’ve given to our community, my family and many families in Hampton Roads.



Jeff Bristow, CEO - Chief Entertainment Officer

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Preparing to Become Future Ready

BY REBECCA KLEINHAMPLE, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Fifty years ago, an idea was born...a trailblazing community project that began as a little brown building in the woods. This vision of Harry Wason, driven by the Warwick Rotary Club and the Junior League of Hampton Roads, was designed to educate our community children about the wonders of science found here in Virginia's natural heritage. For 50 years, families have flocked to what is now the Virginia Living Museum, a well-loved institution of learning, conservation and personal memories.

"The museum now welcomes *Future Ready*, both a celebration of the 50 year milestone and preparation for imminent success" says campaign Co-Chair, Charles Wornom. *Future Ready* is a \$5 million campaign for sustainability and science achievement. It is also a celebration of five decades of accomplishments, strength and resiliency. "The campaign will propel the museum into the future by featuring a blend of dynamic exhibits, exciting educational programming, a capital addition and financial security," Wornom adds.

A new major attraction, the permanent outdoor Dinosaur Discovery Trail, will transport visitors to the amazing prehistoric world of these fantastic creatures. A playful sculpture of a black bear family by David Turner will be a focal point for photos and memories. A new animal care facility will enhance the

museum's care of large animals and meet American Zoological Association accrediting requirements. Funding will also provide sanctuary and state-of-the-art veterinary care for non-releasable wildlife.

This campaign will provide funds to expand programming in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and math; initiate STEM and health career pathways for our region's youth, and expand programming to support conservation of Virginia's wildlife and the environment.

"We can prepare students to be career ready by starting early," says Mike Petters, Honorary Chair for the Virginia Living Museum's 50th Anniversary Campaign. "We must begin by laying the foundations of literacy in science, technology, engineering and math for our future. The museum has done just that for 50 years. Children ignite their imagination as they explore and experiment at the living museum. But this doesn't happen all but itself. This takes a community."

The museum's goal to double the endowment will strengthen its ability to withstand future challenges and increase services to the community. The VLM Eagle Society recognizes and honors friends of the museum who have made special provisions for the museum's future in their estate plans. Meaningful legacy gifts tailored to individual goals help ensure shared values will be met while enabling the museum's natural science mission to endure.

"The Virginia Living Museum truly is built by the community, beloved by the community and sustained by the community" says Wornom. "We've already raised \$3.3 million. This *Future Ready* campaign will preserve and promote this *natural treasure* for families like ours for many years to come," says an enthusiastic Wornom.



Photo by Abbitt Realty Co.



FOR THOSE WHO INSPIRE, CONSERVE AND CONNECT

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE VIRGINIA LIVING MUSEUM FOR ITS 50 YEARS OF BRINGING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TOGETHER WITH THE WONDERS OF NATURE.

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BIG BELIEVERS IN YOU

The club members and their spouses in 1972



Virginia Living Museum – A vision fulfilled

It all started with a vision – one man’s vision – that the community should have a place where families could go to see, touch and feel nature..... a place where the animals, birds, plants and trees could come alive for people to appreciate what blessings nature has given us.

That man is Harry Wason. The place, the Virginia Living Museum. The vision of a living museum started out small in 1964, when two organizations — the Warwick Rotary Club and the Junior League — formed a steering committee, sold the concept to community leaders, and started to raise funds to build the Peninsula Nature and Science Center. With community support and a series of fundraising activities in 1965, the project was started with an initial budget of \$150,000 and a thirty year lease for twenty-five acres at Deer Park. The building would contain a main section for exhibits and administration, a live animal room, classroom and a planetarium. Construction began in January, 1966.

In July, 1967, Harry Wason, who spearheaded the whole effort, became President of the Warwick Rotary Club and helped to officiate at the opening of the building, which was dedicated by Virginia Governor Mills Godwin on November 13, 1966. It was a proud moment for the Warwick Rotary Club and the Junior League — a dream come true!

Subsequent improvements and

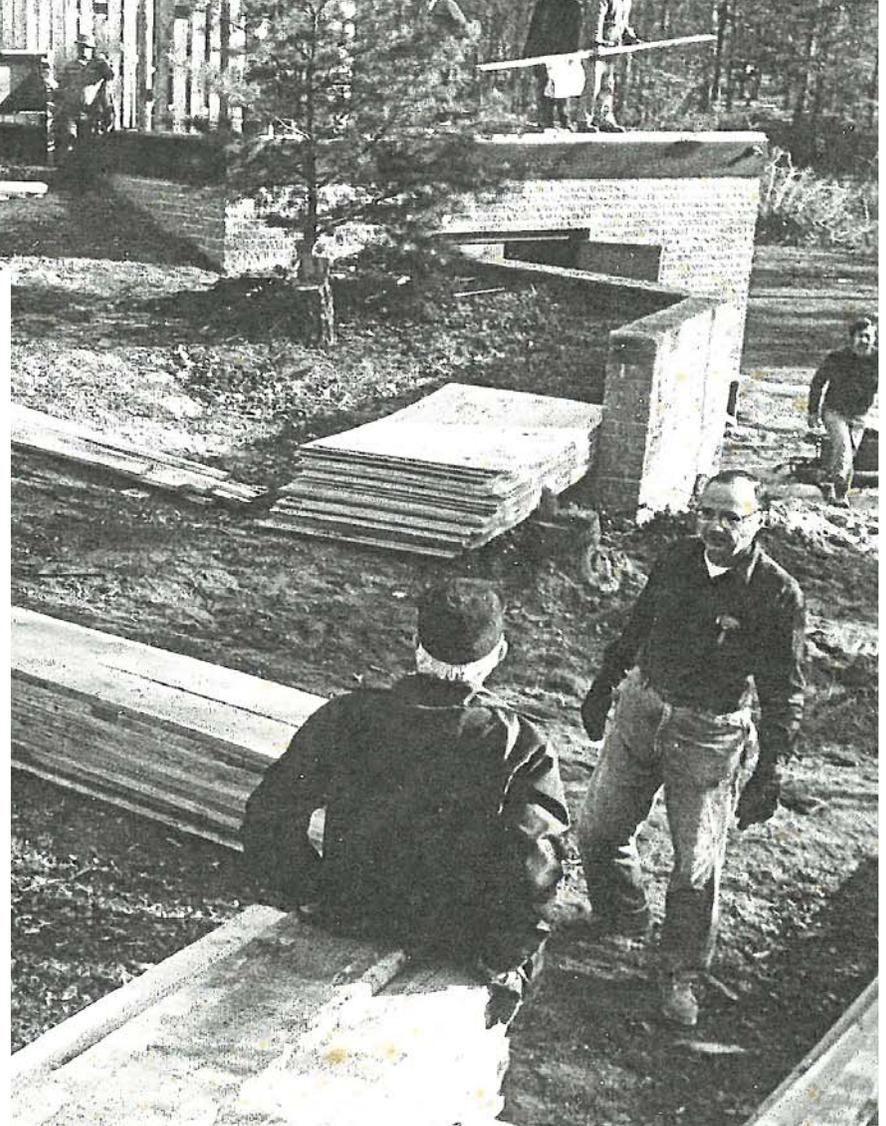
upgrades to the facility continued through the years adding air-conditioning, shop facility, aquarium, and observatory. Expansion in 1981 doubled the size of the Center. In 1987, the Center was expanded again, this time to over 25,000 square feet, and the facility was named the Virginia Living Museum (VLM).

As one of the founding fathers, the Warwick Rotary Club has continued its strong association with the VLM and, as a result, on the club’s 50th anniversary in 1995, was presented with the first-ever “Golden Paw” award for the creation and sponsorship of the Virginia Living Museum.

Today, the Warwick Rotary Club continues to hold its weekly meeting every Monday at 6pm at the Virginia Living Museum’s Wild Side Café’.



Our club banner hanging at the Wild Side Café — where we meet every Monday at 6pm



Our club members helping build the Peninsula Nature and Science Center which later became the Virginia Living Museum



The current Warwick Rotary Club at our annual holiday party.



Congratulations
VIRGINIA LIVING MUSEUM
on your **50th**
Anniversary

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