



COME AND SAY “GOODBYE” TO AN OLD FRIEND

North Pacific Aquarium to close March 30 at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in preparation for opening of the new Pacific Seas Aquarium this summer

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TACOMA, Wash. – John F. Kennedy was president. Gasoline cost about 30 cents a gallon. The median home price across the U.S. was just over \$19,000. And the coolest building in Tacoma was the brand new aquarium-in-the-round at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.



But after 55 years of service, millions of visitors and about a bazillion memories made, that showpiece of 1963 – the North Pacific Aquarium – is about to be retired.

It’s time to come and say “Goodbye” to an old friend.

The round centerpiece of the zoo’s 29-acre campus will close to the public as a saltwater aquarium at 4 p.m. on March 30. A two-day special event is scheduled March 24 and 25 for visitors who want to come and share their memories.

But, really, any day during March is a good time to come and reminisce. The zoo is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.

The closure will be a bittersweet moment for many longtime community members, zoo visitors and employees, who will be sad to see the end of the building’s public life as home to a stunning number and variety of fish and other sea creatures, but who also are eager for the opening of its successor.

“This is one more exciting milestone along the road to opening the 35,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art Pacific Seas Aquarium this summer,” said Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners President Andrea Smith.

“The North Pacific Aquarium played a crucial role in the growth of the zoo and helped generations of our guests



Top: The hands-on Marine Discovery Center touch exhibit has provided years of excitement, enjoyment and discovery about the wonders of sea creatures in the North Pacific Aquarium at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

Bottom: A vintage photo of the North Pacific Aquarium.

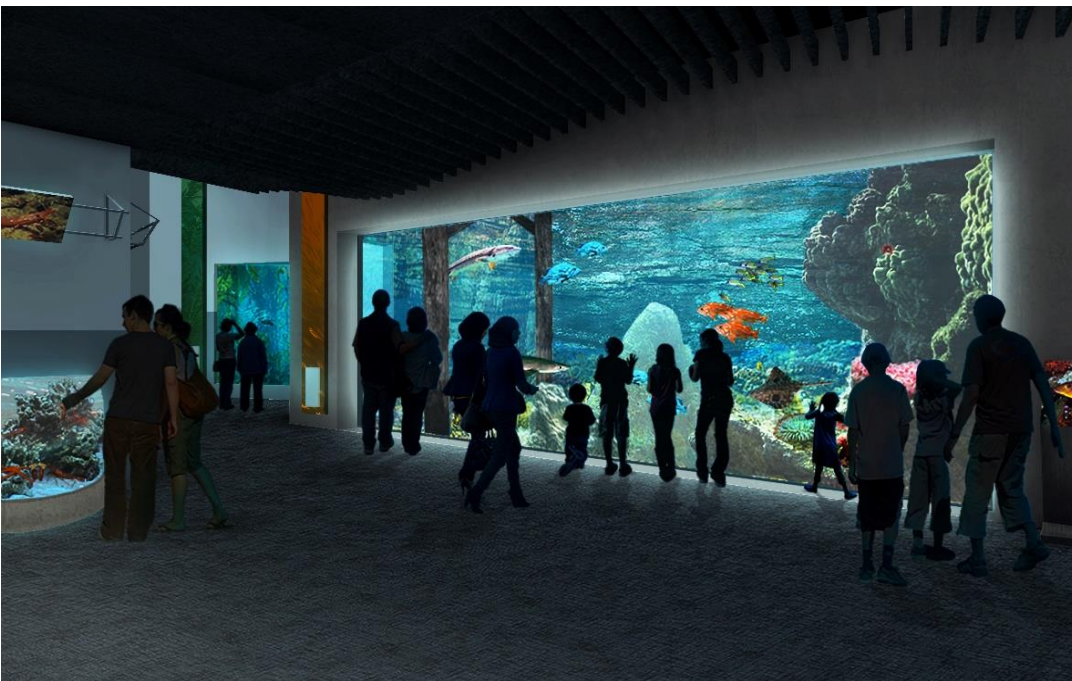


learn more about the fish and other sea animals that live in Puget Sound and the waters of the northern Pacific Ocean,” Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Deputy Director John Houck said.

Zoo officials are confident the new Pacific Seas Aquarium will do a stellar job of carrying on that legacy – with an added benefit.

Not only will it showcase animals from the North Pacific Aquarium, its stunning 275,000-gallon Baja Bay habitat will be home to an amazing array of tropical fish. Plus, visitors will see three exciting new species never before seen at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium: green sea turtles, scalloped hammerhead sharks, and spotted eagle rays.

Construction of the Pacific Seas Aquarium was made possible by Tacoma voters, who approved money to build it as part of a Metro Parks Tacoma bond issue in 2014. Many of them likely had visited and made indelible memories gazing into the North Pacific Aquarium’s 135,000-gallon Community Exhibit. Or learning about and touching small sea animals in the Marine Discovery Center.



Top: A postcard from Metro Parks Tacoma’s historical files shows the new North Pacific Aquarium as it looked at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in the early 1960s. **Bottom:** An architect’s rendering shows the new Northwest Waters habitat being constructed in the Pacific Seas Aquarium. It will contain species from the North Pacific Aquarium and be home to even more animals.

Or looking into dozens of smaller water-filled exhibits along a darkened lower level with somewhat of a starship feel. At the “NPA,” as zoo staff lovingly call it, it was easy for visitors to think of themselves as underwater ocean pioneers, peering into the secrets of the deep.

Over the years, thousands of people attended weddings and receptions, company parties and other events on the top floor of the North Pacific Aquarium, overlooking its once-novel cylindrical, two-story saltwater exhibit.

But now, after 55 years of saltwater corroding portions of the building and causing deterioration, it’s time for a retirement party.

On March 24 and 25, visitors will be invited to share their memories on a bubble-note memory wall upstairs.

And any visit to the North Pacific Aquarium – even a goodbye tour – is always a good time to stare down a rockfish, touch a sea star and ogle the colorful sea nettles.

The closure at the end of this month is necessary so the aquarium team can use the entire building to care for the animals that are already there, plus new sea creatures coming in, before they move to their new homes in the Pacific Seas Aquarium. Once the aquarium team's work is complete there, the saltwater will be removed in preparation for potential use of the building for another purpose. The zoo's Capital Facilities Master Plan envisions a South America exhibit in the building, but the project would require significant additional funding. Meanwhile, zoo officials are exploring potential short-term and mid-term opportunities for the structure.

It will soon be time to say "Hello" to a new friend.

"We are growing more excited by the day for the opening of the Pacific Seas Aquarium," Metro Parks Board President Smith said. "It not only broadens the numbers and types of species we can show our aquarium visitors, it fits perfectly into Metro Parks' mission to provide environmental education and promote appreciation for nature and wildlife. We are certain visitors will leave with a new appreciation for our ocean, the animals that live there and the need to protect them."

The zoo's South Pacific Aquarium, home to 16 large sharks, dozens of tropical fish, Stingray Cove and the popular Eye-to-Eye Shark Dive program, remains open as usual. It is not closing, so once the Pacific Seas Aquarium opens, zoo visitors still will have not one, but two, world-class aquariums to explore.

For more information, go to www.pdza.org/npa. To get ticket prices, or to skip the lines and buy tickets online, go to www.pdza.org/rates.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

Contacts

Kris Sherman, 253-226-6718 or kris.sherman@pdza.org

Whitney DalBalcon, 253-404-3637; 253-278-6343 or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org