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OCEANS COMMISSION, 1/15/02

HOW APPROPRIATE TO CHOSE CHARLESTON AS THE VENUE FOR THE FIRST MEETING OF THE US COMMISSION ON OCEAN POLICY, SINCE I AM TOLD THAT IT IS HERE THAT THE COOPER AND ASHLEY RIVERS COME TOGETHER TO FORM THE ATLANTIC OCEAN!

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM:

- OPENED MAY 2000
- \$69 MILLION PROJECT; \$47 PUBLIC FUNDS, \$22 MILLION FROM PRIVATE SOURCES
- 1.2 MILLION VISITORS SINCE MAY 2000
- 25,000 MEMBERS, 12,000 MEMBER HOMES
- PRIVATE 501 © 3 NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION WITH A 45 PERSON BOARD OF DIRECTORS
- 100 STAFF AND 400 VOLUNTEERS
- DESIGNATED A COASTAL LEARNING CENTER BY COASTAL AMERICA
- ACCREDITED TO THE AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION (AZA)
- REPRESENTED ON THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE OCEAN PROJECT

THIS IS A SERIOUS AQUARIUM WITH A SERIOUS AND PRESSING MISSION – ENHANCING PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PUBLIC TO GET INVOLVED IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE TAKE OURSELVES TOO SERIOUSLY AND WE REALIZE THAT - AS SOMEONE ONCE SAID - “A MUSEUM CAN ONLY TOUCH THOSE IT CAN ATTRACT”

AND TO CONTINUE TO ATTRACT AND STABILIZE OUR AUDIENCE BASE WE WILL BE OPENING A NEW SPECIAL EXHIBIT ENTITLED “UNBELIEVABLE FLOATING OBJECTS: RHYTHMS OF THE COAST” IN MARCH. IN CASE YOU WONDERED, THAT IS WHAT IS GOING ON BEHIND THE CONSTRUCTION WALL IN THE GREAT HALL.

WITH TED BEATTIE (THE DIRECTOR OF THE SHEDD AQUARIUM AND THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION) AND PAUL SANDIFER (THE HEAD OF SC DNR AND A VERY ACTIVE SOUTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM BOARD MEMBER) INVOLVED WITH THE COMMISSION, I AM SURE THAT YOU WILL ALL BE LEFT IN NO DOUBT AS TO THE IMPORTANT ROLE THAT ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS CAN PLAY IN FURTHERING PUBLIC OPINION OF AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF OCEAN'S RESOURCES.

ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS ARE INCREDIBLY POPULAR AND RESPECTED INSTITUTIONS. EVERY YEAR OVER 140 MILLION PEOPLE VISIT AZA ACCREDITED ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS IN NORTH AMERICA, WHICH IS MORE THAN ATTEND ALL OF THE MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS COMBINED. WE PROVIDE SAFE AND RESPECTED HAVENS FOR ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATION AND REFLECTION FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND BACKGROUNDS. ANIMALS, IT SEEMS, TRANSCEND BOUNDARIES AND BARRIERS.

FURTHERMORE A SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE A FEW YEARS AGO PUT ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS IN THE TOP THREE MOST TRUSTED PROVIDERS OF INFORMATION ON THE

ENVIRONMENT, ALONG WITH NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AND (AT THE TIME) JACQUES COUSTEAU.

WE'RE POPULAR AND PEOPLE TRUST US.

ALSO ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS ARE AN INCREDIBLE LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INDEED INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND ACTION. COLLECTIVELY IN NORTH AMERICA WE ARE OVER 200 AZA ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS, 15 COASTAL LEARNING CENTERS AND OVER 400 SUPPORTERS OF THE RECENTLY FORMED OCEAN PROJECT.

SO WE'RE POPULAR, WE'RE TRUSTED - AND WE'RE A COORDINATED RESOURCE THAT IS ALREADY ACTIVE – AND IS ALSO READY TO DO MORE.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT PROGRAMS HERE AT THE SOUTH CAROLINA AQUARIUM, NOTING THAT SIMILAR PROGRAMS OCCUR AT ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY?

- OUR FOCUS IS A WATERSHED STORY, THAT SOMEONE LIVES DOWNSTREAM, AND THAT PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING WE DO IMPACTS SOMEONE ELSE'S QUALITY OF LIFE. OUR THEME IS "CONNECTEDNESS", IF YOU WILL. THAT MESSAGE COMES THROUGH LOUD AND CLEAR IN OUR EXHIBITS AND INTERPRETIVE GRAPHICS. OF COURSE, SOUTH CAROLINA IS A COASTAL STATE, BUT SO IS ILLINOIS AND KANSAS.
- OUR SCHOOL PROGRAMS REINFORCE THIS STORY THROUGH SPECIALLY DESIGNED CURRICULA, AND BY PROVIDING FREE ADMISSION TO SCHOOL CHILDREN FROM SC SCHOOLS THAT JOIN OUR EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM.
- OUR COMMUNITY ACCESS PROGRAM ENSURES THAT NO-ONE IS EXCLUDED FROM VISITING THE AQUARIUM IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.
- OUR PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANIZATIONS LIKE SOUTH CAROLINA COASTAL CONSERVATION LEAGUE, SOUTH CAROLINA SEAGRANT, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, SOUTH CAROLINA DNR AND OTHERS ALLOW OUR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS TO NOT ONLY BE INFORMED, BUT ALSO TO GET INVOLVED IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

THE FORMATION OF THE COMMISSION ON OCEAN POLICY IS TIMELY, SOME MIGHT SAY OVERDUE. THERE IS MUCH TO DO AND THINGS ARE CHANGING VERY RAPIDLY. HOWEVER, I WOULD LIKE TO ECHO THE REMARKS THAT SYLVIA EARLE MADE AT ONE OF OUR PRE-OPENING EVENTS HERE IN CHARLESTON. SHE WAS ASKED THAT IF THERE WERE ANOTHER TIME IN HISTORY THAT SHE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO LIVE, WHEN WOULD IT HAVE BEEN? HER RESPONSE WAS "HERE AND NOW" BECAUSE WE ARE AT A PIVOTAL POINT IN DECIDING THE FUTURE OF THE OCEAN, AND THE KIND OF WORLD THAT OUR CHILDREN AND GRAND CHILDREN WILL INHERIT.

Ca/January 16, 2002