

NEWS RELEASE

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Virginia Aquarium Mourns Loss of Beloved Harbor Seal

(Virginia Beach, VA) He loved to bark on cue, and had a loud, beautiful voice that sounded just like a dog! He was not a picky eater, and he was adept at removing fish placed on special disk-shaped sleds that float on the water. His sweet personality will be missed at the Virginia Aquarium, as staff mourns the loss of Peter, our 32 year old Atlantic harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*).

Staff and guests loved Peter, whose speckled side and belly made him easily recognizable. He was a favorite of our marine mammal trainers, and often made his trainers and guests laugh with silly antics.

Peter was born May 1986 at Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, Connecticut. He came to the Virginia Aquarium on August 30, 1996 with his four brothers, when the Mystic Aquarium underwent a major renovation. Of those original four, Piper, age 27, is still with the Aquarium.

“At 32 years old, Peter has lived a long life (for a seal),” said Cynthia Whitbred-Spanoulis, Executive Director of the Virginia Aquarium. “Typical lifespan estimates for harbor seals are about 20 to 25 years in the open ocean, or about 30 years in human care. For Peter to have thrived for 32 years is truly a testament to the incredible level of care that our team provides daily.

“The news of Peter’s death is very hard to share, especially for our mammal team and our veterinary care team. They are consummate professionals and are doing a wonderful job and I know they appreciate your support and understanding during this difficult time.”

Over the past few months, the Virginia Aquarium veterinary team observed signs that Peter’s condition slowly, consistently declined. Although Peter improved from an acute illness over the summer, he continued to lose weight, and his appetite level did not rebounded consistently. These signs were consistent with a change in kidney function, and our team recognized that Peter’s quality of life was declining rapidly. He was euthanized this morning, surrounded by the Virginia Aquarium’s veterinary team and his trainers.

Images of Peter are available at

<https://virginiaaquarium.imagerelay.com/fl/9192616de6f64195873327e0662ae842>

The Virginia Aquarium Foundation is a 501 (c) 3, nonprofit. The purpose of the Foundation is to support the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center in its mission to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research and sustainable practices. Founded in 1981, the Foundation is dedicated to the success of the Aquarium which opened its doors to the public in 1986. Over the years, the Foundation's role in support of the Aquarium has not only included garnering financial support to pay for the Aquarium's exhibits, animals and habitats, but it has expanded to include funding of education programs, and research and conservation efforts such as the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response and Sensible Seafood™ programs.

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