

# NEWS RELEASE

717 General Booth Blvd. Virginia Beach, VA 23451



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Caryl Thompson | 757-385-0250 | CThomps@VirginiaAquarium.com

February 4, 2021

## VIRGINIA AQUARIUM MOURNS LOSS OF BELOVED HARBOR SEAL

(Virginia Beach, VA) He was a very vocal seal with a loud, beautiful bark. He was our most laid-back seal, who loved relaxing on the rocks and gliding through the water. His sweet personality will be missed at the Virginia Aquarium, as staff mourns the loss of Piper, our 29-year-old harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*).

Staff and guests loved Piper, whose speckled side and belly made him easily recognizable. He was a favorite of our marine mammal trainers, and often made them and our guests smile with his loud bark and swirly paintings. Often, Piper made his presence known by splashing guests as they strolled by the seal habitat.

Piper was born May 30, 1991 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 five, Piper was the last of the brothers still at the Virginia Aquarium.

“At 29 years old, Piper has lived beyond the typical life expectancy of harbor seals,” 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 Piper to have thrived for almost 30 years is truly a testament to the incredible level of care that our team provides daily.

“This news is devastating, especially for our mammal team and our veterinary staff. They work tirelessly to provide outstanding care for our animals, and I know they appreciate your support and understanding during this difficult time. We will all miss Piper.”

Over the past several weeks, our animal care team observed signs that Piper’s health was slowly declining. We monitored Piper continuously and provided medical support to ensure his comfort. Although he appeared to improve over the past few days, Piper passed away peacefully this morning.

Images of Piper are available at <https://virginiaaquarium.imagerelay.com/sb/236c4055-238b-4d24-a298-4e2fc3cd799a/piper>.

*The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums. The Aquarium is also a member of World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The Virginia Aquarium’s mission is to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research and sustainable practices. It is located at 717 General Booth Boulevard, just south of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach.*

*The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, supports the work of the Virginia Aquarium. The Foundation procures and maintains the Aquarium's exhibits, including the animals and habitats. It is also responsible for annual and capital fundraising, administration and funding for the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program, conservation and scientific research efforts, and the Aquarium's mission-related education programs. You can be a part of our mission: make a tax-deductible donation to support our incredible programming.*

###