

Letter to the Editor

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2014 Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks & Aquariums' Annual Meeting Draws Strong Attendance and Record Sponsorships; Focuses on International Advocacy and Ensuring a Strong Future for Public Display

More than 100 members and Friends of the Alliance from nine countries attended the Alliance 2014 Annual Meeting at the Gaylord National Resort in National Harbor, Maryland, April 3-5.

Past President Billy Hurley kicked off the meeting with a 2013 year in review and told the group that from lobbying the U.S. Congress, to submitting comments on a range of issues to regulatory bodies in a number of countries, to promoting Alliance standards and accreditation to travel and tourism organizations, and to representing the Alliance in numerous high profile media outlets, the Alliance had a productive year.

Alliance President Kevin Willis with the Minnesota Zoo and Executive Director Kathleen Dezio reported that the Alliance will focus on three strategic priorities in the coming year: (1) advocacy, (2) accreditation, and (3) growth. That work will include a multi-stakeholder advocacy effort centered on communicating the benefits of marine mammals in human care, championing Alliance accreditation as the preeminent accreditation for marine mammal parks, zoos, and aquariums, and initiatives to strengthen and grow the Alliance community.

One of the highlights of the meeting was a thought leader panel discussion about how to ensure a strong future for the public display of marine mammals globally, featuring Brad Andrews, Chief Zoological Officer for SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment; David Kimmel, President & Chief Operating Officer, Georgia Aquarium; Jay Sweeney, President/Partner of Dolphin Quest; and Bill Zeigler, Senior Vice President, Collections and Animal Care, Chicago Zoological Society.

The advocacy portion of the meeting featured presentations from seven U.S. regulators, including Dr. Chester Gipson, Deputy Administrator of Animal Care for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS); Jennifer Skidmore with the

Permits, Conservation & Education Division, Office of Protected Resources of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); Jackie Taylor and Deb Faquier from the NMFS Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program; Dr. Craig Hoover and Lisa Lierheimer with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFS); and Peter Thomas with the Marine Mammal Commission. Legislative and policy updates were also given on developments in Canada, the European Union, Belgium, Mexico, the Caribbean, the Bahamas, and the United States as well as within the Convention on Trade Endangered Species, the Convention on Migratory Species, the International Whaling Convention, and the United Nations Environmental Assembly.

Other popular sessions included one by Patrick Stump, President of Roka Security, titled, "Ten Ways Hackers Can Wreak Havoc on Your Organization and What You Can Do About It," and one by Dr. Jarol Manheim, Professor Emeritus of Media and Public Affairs at The George Washington University, titled, "How Anti-Corporate Activists Have Changed the Business Environment Forever."

Bill Winhall, Chair of the Alliance Accreditation Commission, reported that four new member inspections and 12 reaccreditation inspections were performed in 2013 by 24 Alliance inspectors. Four new members were welcomed into the Alliance: Dolphin Discovery Costa Maya; Dolphin Discovery Moon Palace, Cancun; Dolphin Discovery Tortola, British Virgin Islands; and Loro Parque, Tenerife, Spain.

Three new member applicants were introduced at the meeting: Dolphin Cove, Grand Cayman; Dolphin Discovery, Playa Del Carmen, Mexico; and Dolphin Discovery Anguila, British Virgin Islands. Representatives from Amneville Zoo, France, and Coral World, U.S. Virgin Islands, also attended the meeting as potential new members.

Participants heard updates from the Alliance Education, Communications, Veterinary Advisory, Stranding, and Animal Management Committees.

The American Veterinary Medical Association, the Canadian Association of Zoos & Aquariums, the European Association of Aquatic Mammals, the International Marine Animal Trainers' Association, and the National Marine Mammal Foundation gave organizational updates. Other presentations were given on basic population management and on the importance of the Alliance research mission.

Founding Alliance Executive Director Marilee Menard, who retired last year, was honored at an opening night reception.

The meeting, which was preceded by a day-long Board and Committee Chair retreat, generated record sponsorship support from 17 sponsors and record volunteer participation from an Annual Meeting Committee chaired by Cheryl Messinger of Dolphin Connection that included Michelle Campbell of Dolphin Quest, Eric Gaglione of Georgia Aquarium, Terran McGinnis of Dolphin Connection, Jason Price of Dolphin Quest, and Dennis Christian of Georgia Aquarium. Friends of the Alliance Becky and Brian Masuga with Lunar Cow and Jill Allread with PCI also made special contributions to the meeting.

Meeting sponsors included Animal Necessity, Atlantic Pacific, Dolphin Connection, Dolphin Quest, Georgia Aquarium, Gulf World, Kelley Drye & Warren, Lunar Cow, McRoberts Sales, The Mirage, PGAV, Pisces Seafood, Public Communications Inc., SeaWorld, Six Flags Discovery Kingdom, Theater of the Sea, and TJP Engineering.