

FEATURED

Aquarium of Niagara officials unveil 'bold' plan for the future

STRATEGIC PLAN: Falls attraction announces large-scale renovations, larger sea lion habitat.

By Marisa Religa Contributor

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File photoRepresentatives from the Aquarium of Niagara on Wednesday announced the next steps in the continued development of the popular attraction. Plans are in the works for interior and exterior renovations and the development of a larger sea lion exhibit at the aquarium.



Representatives from the Aquarium of Niagara held a press conference on Wednesday to unveil a new strategic plan for what they say will be a "bold step forward" for the organization.

The strategic plan includes a new vision for the growth of the Aquarium, including the ongoing addition of new exhibits, renovations and eventual expansion.

President of the board of trustees for the Aquarium, Julie Kianof Fink, opened the event with an invitation to celebrate the future.

"Join us as we embrace a broader perspective and concentrate our efforts to become an important education, conservation and cultural destination for all of WNY," she said.

Gary Siddall, executive director of the Aquarium, spoke about the specifics of the plan.

The third new exhibit since 2018 is set to open in early summer 2020. This “M&T Bank Shark & Ray Bay” is a large-scale \$1.85 million dollar exhibit that features a hands-on shark and sting ray touch pool.

Large-scale renovations are in the works which the public can expect to begin to see as early as this spring. The second floor event room will be completely updated top to bottom including the installation of new windows along the entire front wall facing the Niagara Gorge. In addition to improving the building’s exterior, entrance and parking lot, a major priority of the plan is to eventually expand beyond the current building to develop a larger, more naturalistic habitat for the sea lions. The aquarium’s operating budget has increased 45% over the last three years.

According to Siddall, the aquarium recently celebrated 300,000 visitors.

“That is 300,000 people we are showing that Niagara Falls is a great place to stay and there’s a lot of fantastic activities that can support a weekend stay,” he said.

The new plan was created after months of planning with Zoo Advisors, LLC, a private consulting firm who works to help zoos and aquariums advance their missions, increase impact and grow in a sustainable way.

Siddall released the aquarium’s new mission statement: “With our community and partners, we celebrate our natural wonders and inspire people to make a difference for aquatic life.”

At the end of the press conference, attendees were greeted by a special guest - Mia, the sea lion. Mia made an appearance and gave a special hello to newly elected Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino.

Siddall's closing remarks emphasized the direction of growth the aquarium is heading towards.

“We are about to do something impactful. We are about to make a difference, and we are about to become an asset that WNY across the board will be incredibly proud to call their Aquarium of Niagara,” he said.

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