

Monterey Bay Aquarium Opens Bechtel Family Center for Ocean Education and Leadership; Expands Free Education Programs

New Facility Will Provide Staff-Led Experiences for All School Groups, Double Capacity of Teen and Teacher Programs

Monterey Bay Aquarium advances its commitment to inspiring the next wave of ocean leaders with the opening of the [Bechtel Family Center for Ocean Education and Leadership](#). The new \$42 million, environmentally sustainable, 25,000-square-foot center on Cannery Row houses the aquarium's free education programs, allowing hands-on experiences for all visiting school groups and doubling the number of teens and teachers it can serve.

"The new Education Center enables us to take a quantum leap in providing the inspiration and services our teachers and students need to meet today's challenges, underpinned by our commitment to advance ecosystem-based learning," said Monterey Bay Aquarium Executive Director Julie Packard. "We aim to have a long-term impact on improving science education in California, and we're grateful to everyone who helped us make it a reality."

The Bechtel Education Center significantly expands capacity for the aquarium's education and youth development programs. All of the 80,000 students who visit annually can now participate in programs led by the aquarium's team of ocean education specialists, while less than half could be accommodated before.

"Working directly with more students in our learning laboratories is critical to developing their scientific knowledge," said aquarium Vice President of Education Rita Bell. "Research shows that in-depth experiences with aquarium educators have greater impact on student learning than self-guided tours alone."

The aquarium will, over the next five years, double both the number of teens participating in environmental science and leadership programs and in its teacher professional development programs. Before the center was completed, fewer than half the qualified applicants could be accepted each year.

Expanded teen and teacher programs debut this summer. The new learning laboratories in the Bechtel Education Center will welcome students in the fall.

The Bechtel Education Center facilities enhance the aquarium's education programs beyond additional space for students, teens and teachers. Along with learning labs featuring live animal displays and collaborative learning spaces, the four-story building is designed to achieve LEED Gold certification for environmental sustainability. A first-floor exhibit gallery is open free to the public. The fourth floor supports a conference room and rooftop native plant garden.

Thousands of contributions from aquarium members and other donors contributed toward the \$42 million needed to construct the Bechtel Education Center. This included a generous lead gift from the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation and major support from Betty and Gordon Moore.

Monterey Bay Aquarium offers the largest free-admission education program of any aquarium in the United States and has welcomed more than 2.5 million participating schoolchildren, teens and teachers since the aquarium opened in October 1984. The programs cost \$5 million each year and are made possible by donor contributions.

About Monterey Bay Aquarium

With a mission to inspire conservation of the ocean, the Monterey Bay Aquarium is the most admired aquarium in the United States, a leader in science education, and a voice for ocean conservation through comprehensive programs in marine science and public policy. Everything we do works in concert to protect the future of our blue planet. More information at montereybayaquarium.org.