

# Mystic Aquarium

## Chief Executive Officer

*The Board seeks a mission-driven, results-oriented executive to lead an internationally prominent nonprofit aquarium that inspires public support for healthy marine ecosystems through education, research, wildlife recovery and advocacy.*

*As an unparalleled regional economic driver, Mystic Aquarium attracts about 800,000 visitors to SE Connecticut. The CEO, staff and board deliver compelling, constantly refreshed visitor experiences filled with family joy, surprise, fun, learning and play.*

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2023 Connecticut's [Mystic Aquarium](#) celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> year since its founding in 1973 as a living laboratory and wildlife experience for visitors. The 18+ acre campus provides a broad array of environments for different animals; research and care facilities; educational exhibits and playful learning areas for children and families. Visitors experience Arctic shorelines, North America's Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coastal waters, and tropical and other marine ecosystems in ways that bring into focus global concerns about how we treat our planet and its marine inhabitants. Highlights include the largest outdoor beluga whale exhibit in the USA, a penguin pavilion, a ray and shark touch pool, a jellyfish gallery, an animal rescue clinic and a Veterinary and Animal Health Center, a state of the art aquaculture lab and animal holding area, an 18,000 sq-foot Ocean Science and Conservation Center, and an array of classrooms and conference facilities.

**Mystic Aquarium** is a member of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA), an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and is certified by American Humane. With an annual budget of \$30m, 270 full-time staff and 300 volunteers during peak season, it enjoys outstanding local, national and international partnerships with premier educational and academic research institutions.

The CEO will develop and implement new strategic and master plans that positions **Mystic Aquarium** as a must-visit destination for families; as a valued partner to business, nonprofit and government groups in the region, and as an institution sought out by policy makers and environmental leaders as a resource and partner. The CEO will also assume responsibility for Mystic Aquarium's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations, which will be used as a platform for introducing the CEO to constituents and to refresh the visiting public's relationship with the renowned marine science and education institution.

### **BASIC FUNCTION**

The CEO will lead, financially strengthen and continually upgrade the visitor experience of **Mystic Aquarium** as it engages children, families, teachers, the general public, business leaders, scientists, the media and those with influence over public policy related to ocean ecosystems and marine life, through hands-on, minds-on education, science and conservation research.

Reporting to the Board through the Board's Executive Committee, the CEO manages the team that oversees all aspects of **Mystic Aquarium** facilities, operations, living collections, exhibitions, education and public programming, research, animal care, conservation, and advocacy. The CEO is also responsible for developing, continually updating and implementing a Strategic Plan that sets earned and contributed revenue, financial management, marketing and branding, visitor experience, human resource development, animal care and asset management objectives through 2030.

The CEO is expected to work closely with the staff and the Board to ensure that **Mystic Aquarium**:

- **Guarantees an exceptional visitor experience that informs visitors of marine ecosystems, plants and animals.** In the process, the CEO will build upon Mystic Aquarium's reputation as a compelling science-based educational attraction focused on marine



life, conservation practices, animal care & research, and advocacy, and deliver programs and exhibits that are fun, distinctive, exciting, and thought-provoking.

- **Is financially and operationally strengthened** by a mix of aggressive and diversified fundraising, maximum ticket sales during peak times and improved attendance during non-peak times, development of earned income opportunities through in-facility sales and rentals, and through efficient use of **Mystic Aquarium** resources.
- **Retains current, and builds new members and constituencies** including audiences of different ethnicities, backgrounds and ages among both residents and seasonal visitors to Mystic, Connecticut, including through partnerships with schools, businesses, other nonprofits, churches and government entities;
- **Evolves its research, exhibitions and educational & public programming** in a way that is true to mission with a focus on cost-efficiency, financial sustainability, and meaningful educational content that conveys insight, so that critical points on conservation are made in impactful ways that audiences embrace and wish to experience again and again;
- **Continues to be recognized for its conservation and scientific efforts** with a strong emphasis on: the belugas; providing a survey of marine animals from around the world that can be responsibly sustained at the aquarium; and the plants and creatures of Long Island Sound and neighboring estuaries, shorelines, canyons and other marine ecosystems.

**PRIORITIES OF THE CEO INCLUDE TO:**

- Understand all facets of Mystic Aquarium, its history, culture, people, exhibits, finances, education and public programs, research, facilities, assets and infrastructure, operations and its potential; understand the diverse constituencies of the region, including partners and tourists who visit southeastern Connecticut and who could be attracted to the aquarium;
- Significantly improve earned revenue from aquarium operations by focusing attention and accountability on increased attendance and ticket sales, in-facility sales (of special-access areas, merchandise, rentals, food, etc) and delivery of a magnificent visitor experience that people wish to repeat; in particular, develop programs that maximize attendance during off-season periods and off-peak times of each week;
- Significantly increase contributed revenue for annual operations by appropriately engaging all hands (staff, Board and volunteers) in annual fundraising; initiate a capital and endowment campaign focused on addressing deferred maintenance issues, and to ensure that sufficient funds are available to continually refresh the organization's infrastructure, visitor facilities, signage, and physical appearance;
- With the staff and with Board oversight, develop exhibits, programs, facilities, staffing plans and operating infrastructure that can be administered within appropriate budgetary constraints;
- Create alignment around key conservation themes in a way that engages the talent, and concentrates the resources, of the whole organization, in the process reinforcing a culture of excellence that visitors appreciate and that motivates visitors to repeat the experience.

**The CEO is also specifically responsible for:**

**LEADERSHIP & GENERAL MANAGEMENT**

- Manage the day-to-day business affairs of Mystic Aquarium with the intent of achieving greater financial independence and sustainability; with the Board, continually refine Mystic Aquarium's Strategic and Master Plan; ensure that Mystic Aquarium is viewed as a welcoming place to work and visit by peoples of all ages, identities, ethnicities, abilities, education and income levels;

- Hire, supervise, motivate, develop and evaluate staff, ensuring that staffing is appropriate and fairly compensated to meet the organization's goals; ensure that approved policies are consistently implemented; develop a business culture focused on customer joy achieved by delivering unparalleled, constantly refreshed visitor experiences with great educational content.
- Oversee the preservation and maintenance of Mystic Aquarium's physical assets (the exhibits, buildings and the infrastructure of the organization); continue to build out the aquarium facilities as needed.

#### REVENUE DEVELOPMENT, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Serve as "Chief Earned & Contributed Revenue Officer" for Mystic Aquarium; work closely with the staff, Board, and advisors to expand revenue by maximizing membership and attendance of diverse audience cohorts, esp. by building attendance during off-peak hours/seasons, and through program fees, admissions, licensing, facility rentals, concessions, events and other sources; set and achieve aggressive targets for increased financial support from foundations, corporations, individuals, government and other philanthropic sources to fund annual operation and capital projects;
- Serve as a charismatic, articulate and persuasive spokesperson for Mystic Aquarium; represent Mystic Aquarium to all of its constituencies; cultivate strong and supportive relationships with other institutions in the region, in the community and with those in local, state and federal government entities and in the legislature; identify and help recruit new supporters whose talents, interests and commitment will help advance Mystic Aquarium's mission and programs and expand funding opportunities; nurture strong community partnerships; work to ensure active engagement of Board talent and resources in support of the institution.

#### EXHIBITS, EDUCATIONAL AND PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

- Solidify Mystic Aquarium's reputation as a leader in the conservation movement known for exceptional programs; work collaboratively, and appropriately manage various relationships, with other like organizations as well as thought-leaders in the field, advocates, schools, universities, patrons, volunteers and other community members;
- Work with staff to develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen, continually refresh and enrich Mystic Aquarium's education programming, scientific research, animal recovery and other programs; develop relationships with others outside of the organization who can strengthen programming and contribute to upgrading permanent and temporary exhibitions.

#### GOVERNANCE

- Engage and energize the Board and under the direction of the Board's Chair, set the strategic direction for Mystic Aquarium; implement Board policies, goals, priorities and objectives; keep the Board informed of all relevant issues; attend all Board meetings and committee meetings as required; identify and help recruit new Board members whose talents, interests and commitment can further Mystic Aquarium's mission and programs, and help to expand funding;
- Work with the Chair to ensure an effective Board committee structure and active engagement of Board talent and resources in support of the institution; cultivate a mutually supportive relationship with stakeholders, area colleges and universities, government oversight and funding agencies, and other groups that are important to the future of the institution.

#### **IDEAL EXPERIENCE and PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Candidates should have the following combinations of experience and qualifications:

***Mystic Aquarium  
Chief Executive Officer***

- Strong management and leadership responsibility for an institution that hosts hundreds of thousands of people annually, with experience that might include: aquaria, zoos, land trusts, heritage sites, festivals, museum, performing arts centers, amusement and entertainment parks, education or policy institutes, schools, and a broad range of hospitality and user experience businesses with a strong economic impact on businesses and citizens of a region;
- A mission-driven individual with a belief in and commitment to science, conservation, research and education; broad familiarity with organizations that host living creatures and whose patrons and visitors are of different ages and backgrounds; an ability to productively engage with subject matter experts, educators, curators, researchers, conservationists, scientists, business leaders, government officials, and the general public;
- Experience leveraging media to drive positive audience attention and sustained engagement; strong brand development, marketing and communication channel management is important; advantageous would also be experience with tech used to engage audiences, including tech used in schools, assistive tech for patrons with disabilities, and laptops/cell phone tech;
- Measurable and successful results raising optimizing revenue, including: identifying, cultivating and soliciting individual, foundation and government donors; deep knowledge of marketing and management approaches that increase ticket sales, retail revenue and other earned income;
- A detailed understanding of operations and financial management in a similarly complex business; an understanding of capital projects and facilities management is important, as is a track record as an effective, well-respected manager adept at planning, prioritizing, organizing and following through;
- Outstanding oral and written communication skills, including the means to address issues in non-confrontational and non-polarizing ways, but nevertheless with determination; a listener and strategist comfortable distilling input from disparate sources into well-organized plans;
- A hard worker and team builder with a high energy level who welcomes and demands accountability, cultivates trust, has integrity, and guides others in a similar vein; determined yet respectful of others' concerns; someone with the flexibility and creativity needed to find alternative ways to reach objectives when barriers arise; a skilled negotiator who avoids driving themselves or others into corners;
- A "doer", with a willingness to work hands-on; emotionally mature with a very good sense of humor and perspective.

For more information please contact:

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