



VOLUNTEERS:

By Tom Bentley

THE SOUL OF THE MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

The Monterey Bay Aquarium is world-renowned for its extraordinary collection of marine life, including the enrapturing power of its exhibit spaces and its commitment to educating the world on the wonders of the deep, as well as informing that world of threats to those wonders. But few people know that the well-greased wheels of the aquarium are kept on track by the striking dedication of its volunteer staff.

Numbering over 1,000 people, the volunteer force makes significant contributions across the whole of Aquarium operations. From clerical workers in the Human Resources Department and guides who dress up as elves at Halloween, to specialists versed in the ways of marine birds and specialist “chefs” who blend tiny sea creatures in industrial blenders to feed the forces aquatic, volunteers are here, there and everywhere at the Aquarium. And some of them have been there more than 20 years.

When the Aquarium opened on October 20, 1984, there were over 300 volunteers at the ready, fired by the longstanding history of community volunteerism embodied by David and Lucile Packard, whose one-time personal gift of \$55 million funded construction. The training programs for those original volunteers have greatly evolved to structured classes and periodic informational “enrichments” that reflect the new programs and acquisitions of the ever-expanding Aquarium. Guides are well-versed in marine science and animal behavior. Volunteer divers are extensively trained in CPR, oxygen administration and rescue level training, even if much of their time is involved in scraping always-encroaching algae off exhibit windows. That notwithstanding, divers appreciate the vantage point.

Alice Bourget, who has been diving at the Aquarium for 15 years, says, “It’s an exchange: the Aquarium gives to me as I give to it, and I’m grateful. I get to keep my skills up, my gear current, I receive continued education and I spend time with like-minded people: divers and environmentalists. We’ve had the same group for many years. It’s a strong sense of community, both with my team and the Aquarium.”

A community it is: three generations of family members have volunteered together, as well as husband-and-wife teams. Some divers are still active in their 70s and beyond. And more youthful activists abound. On the day this article was being written, Ruth Buell, the manager of volunteer resources, was off at a Student Guide Recruitment to enlist 100 high school students as future ambassadors of ocean conservation. Things have come a long way since some volunteers took sea otters home to baby-sit them in their bathtubs, but the sense of an Aquarium “family” still prevails, and it’s a model for organizations the world over. ■

CONTACT/TICKET INFO

ExpressJet passengers can make an easy, under-15-minute drive to the Aquarium from the Monterey Peninsula Airport.

Monterey Bay Aquarium

886 Cannery Row
 Monterey, California 93940
 831.648.4800 | mbayaq.org

Adults	\$24.95
Children (3 thru 12)	\$15.95
Children (under 3)	Free
Students	\$22.95
Seniors (65+)	\$22.95
Disabled	\$15.95
Memberships Available	

Regular Hours

10 a.m. – 6 p.m. daily

Holidays

9:30 a.m. – 6 p.m. | Closed Dec. 25

DEDICATION

