

Wets Happening

The Official Newsletter of the Newport Aquarium Volunteer Dive Program

Issue 5 – June 2005

By Jen Wolfe

IN THIS ISSUE

- The Great Shark Shuffle • Bench Diving With the Director
- Meet the Staff • A Review of the Rules • Jen2's Surface Interval

The Great Shark Shuffle

The month of May saw lots of sharks coming and going at the Aquarium



Baby bonnethead at the warehouse. Apparently, Mark forgot to teach them to chew with their mouths closed.

There are some new faces in the Coral Reef and Shark Tank, and we've said goodbye (or 'good riddance' depending on your point of view) to some long-time tenants. In the Coral Reef tunnel, say hello to two juvenile bonnetheads. In the last issue of *Wets Happening*, it was mentioned that we had six bonnetheads bound for the tank, but unfortunately some of them were in poor health when they arrived at the warehouse and did not survive. The two remaining bonnetheads are doing very well, however, and are very fun to feed! They're getting bigger everyday and already can no longer be fed without the use of the thick

neoprene gloves. Their teeth *will* break the skin. How do I know that? Well, uh... nevermind. The two large yellow-margin triggers have been removed from the tank to prevent injury to the baby sharks. The triggers are now in a holding tank at the warehouse. Honest. *"I like mine with lettuce and tomato, Heinz 57 and French fried potatoes..."* Just kidding.

In preparation for the arrival of new animals in the shark tank, eight nurse sharks were removed from the exhibit on May 16. They also now reside at the warehouse; some of them will go on to the Indianapolis Zoo.

On Wednesday, May 18, two zebra sharks were placed in the acclimation pool of the shark tank. On the following Friday, they were released into the tank escorted by two pairs of divers. Mark "The Shark" Dvornak and I followed the female, while Diver Ed and Jeff Gibula took the male. The female entered the tank and made a beeline for the deep well where she sat on the bottom for an hour. The male, on the other hand, had Diver Ed and Jeff huffing around after him as he cruised busily around the tank non-stop for the entire hour. Both animals are doing very well, and as many of you may have heard, are quite a treat to dive with! In the weeks that followed, two honeycomb whiptail stingrays were introduced to the shark tank.

As beautiful and impressive as these new animals are, they were the warm-up acts for the real diva. The secret is out and so is she. On Friday, June 10 at 9am, amid a sea of local and national media, the only shark ray in North America emerged into the shark tank escorted by four divers.



Shark Move Set-Up: A big box, a crane, and a big sling

She behaved nervously for the first 20 minutes or so, swimming vertically and popping her head out of the water. Thankfully, the other sharks gave her no trouble at all. In fact, the sandtigers actually veered away from her several times. After a short while, the shark ray began to relax and cruised curiously around the tank, even coming quite close to the divers.

So far she has been a delight to dive with. She's quite curious and not at all afraid of the divers



A photo of the shark ray in the holding tank at the warehouse.

or the maintenance equipment. Folks, I don't know what to say other than she's one of the most beautiful creatures I've ever seen. And to know her plight will make you love her all the more. As you've likely heard from the media releases and the in-house handouts, shark rays are extremely rare. Despite this, they are one of the most prized species in the soup fin trade. It is the mission of the Newport Aquarium that through her popularity and the fanfare of her arrival, we can make the public aware of the pressures shark species face from the horrific practice of

shark finning. We also hope that her fascinating appearance and endearing nature will help us to dispel the awful myths about sharks and show the public the truth about these beautiful and mysterious creatures that deserve our respect and our protection.



The shark ray taking a squid from my hand at the warehouse.

Bench Diving With the Director

Executive Director Eric Rose shares his scuba stories

In the last issue of *Wets Happening*, we learned that our new director, Eric Rose, is quite the diver. As promised, here are some of his diving adventures.

When Eric worked at the Living Seas Aquarium, he helped to lay pipeline in the Florida Keys for their collection facility. He describes commercial diving as connecting bolts underwater, but stresses the importance of maintaining a calm, cool and collected demeanor. He's learned that you can't become complacent--that is a threat to your safety.

At the Sydney Aquarium he helped lay 120 feet of pipeline in the harbor. He described it as nasty diving, with low visibility and lots of underwater debris. *Ah... sounds like quarry diving!*

The coolest part of diving is when he can go with his wife, Martine. They hold hands while they dive and he loves to hear her giggle (which she does a lot) underwater. *Gee, that's a lot nicer than what my dive buddies hear me say underwater.*

Eric has over 2,000 hours booked, with most of that time from tank diving at the Living Seas and the Sea World shark tank. Personal diving has taken him to the Bahamas, northern California and even the east coast of Malaysia. The Southeast Asia dives, he says, had a primitive feel. From the broken-down boats you ride out in... the whole experience was more laid back. He has spent a lot of time in the Florida Keys, springs diving and open water collecting.

Eric describes his dives as all different and all good. He says his past colleagues were jealous when he told them he was going to a place where if he had a bad day, he could strap on a tank and go for a dive. He can't wait to dive in all the Aquarium tanks. He thoroughly enjoyed his first dive in our shark tank here, saying that all the fish looked in good health. He also enjoyed hanging out with all the "night divers" at the Hofbräuhaus after a Tuesday evening

scrub. I gotta tell you, he's got some hilarious husbandry stories. From a piece of krill in his ear canal, to manatee abscess goo, don't be fooled by the suit – this guy's spent plenty of time up to his elbows in... uh, you don't want to know.

**Special thanks to Jill Isaacs for her help with this interview.*



Meet the Staff

Mark "The Shark" Dvornak

Title: Senior Aquatic Biologist

Exhibits: Coral Reef, Surrounded by Sharks, warehouse

Education: BSc- Marine Biology (Auburn University);

BSc- Zoology (Oregon State University)

Favorite Aquarium Inhabitant: Shark Ray

Favorite Dive Destination: Red Sea

A word to the volunteer divers: "Beers on Jen!!!"

A Review of the Rules

Slippery When Wet

A reminder to squeegee the floors after your squishy selves



Recently, one of the office ladies slipped and fell in the ladies' locker room.

Thankfully, she was not seriously injured, but it was a strong reminder of how important it is for the divers to squeegee the floor *immediately* after they exit the showers. Guys, you too. Those nice dress shoes that the suits have to wear aren't much good for wet ceramic tile. If at any time there is not a squeegee in the locker rooms, please tell me immediately. Thank you for your cooperation.

Media Policy

"No comment..."

With lots of media folks around covering the arrival of the shark ray, I would just like to remind all of you of the Newport Aquarium's media policy. Please do not discuss any aquarium information with any member of the media. All media inquiries can be directed to our public relations manager, Jill Isaacs. Thanks again for your cooperation.

Jen2's Surface Interval

www.savethesharks.org

I decided to add in a little section for miscellaneous stuff I'd like to share with you. Informative websites, leisure reading, and the like. This month I want to tell you about the Defenders of Wildlife organization. They have a special section to their website right now to raise awareness about the deplorable practice of shark finning. Check it out at www.savethesharks.org

Special Thanks to Bob Schuck for making the shark-shaped wooden key chains for the new set of shark keys. Way to go, Bob!