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jhamachek@moodygardens.org**MOODY GARDENS REVEALS SHOWCASES TREASURES IN THE AQUARIUM PYRAMID**

*Humboldt penguins, multi-level oil rig aquarium, guest-to-diver communications
and shipwreck replica included in enhancements*

GALVESTON, Texas — Hidden behind the doors of Moody Gardens' Aquarium Pyramid awaits an awe-inspiring underwater experience that includes a new Humboldt Penguin Habitat, a Mangrove Lagoon touch tank home to stingrays and a multi-level 30,000 gallon Gulf of Mexico Rig Exhibit.

Following a \$37 million renovation a few years ago, guests journey to new depths exploring the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, South Pacific, North Pacific and the Caribbean. Each ocean exhibit highlights different marine sanctuaries and relationship aspects to the seas with conservation messages that underscore the vital importance of the oceans.

"The Aquarium Pyramid is one of the largest and most fascinating aquariums in Texas," said Greg Whittaker, animal husbandry manager at Moody Gardens. "You can see and learn about everything from penguins, to sharks to seals as well as thousands of species of fish and plant life."

The popular Aquarium Pyramid, which opened in 1990, showcases the complex beauty of the world's oceans within the 10-story blue-glass building with 1.5 million gallons of water and more than 10,000 marine animals.

Meet the new Humboldt penguins

With the renovation, Moody Gardens introduced warm-climate Humboldt penguins that hail from Southern Hemisphere waters from the Antarctic Pole to the Equator. This is the second penguin exhibit at Moody Gardens and the Humboldts are right next door to the South Atlantic Penguin Habitat, home to the King, Gentoo, Chinstrap, Rockhopper and Macaroni penguins. As part of the recent renovations, the South Atlantic Penguin Habitat is newly enhanced to better benefit guests and the health and livelihood of the penguins within.

Gulf of Mexico Rig Exhibit

See the balance of technology and nature through the impressive Gulf of Mexico Rig 30,000 gallon, two-story, 23-foot scale model oil production platform aquarium. These manmade islands provide valuable attachment surfaces for a variety of encrusting organisms to create an entire reef ecosystem found throughout the Gulf of Mexico. This new exhibit includes diver communication for presentations and interaction, further engaging guests in their underwater experience.

The Caribbean

A journey to the Caribbean begins with the new Mangrove Lagoon. Touch Cownose Stingrays as they swim lazily around the jungle of stilt roots that most of the region's fish call home. Naturalists are on hand to help

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guests learn more about these important ecosystems. A second touch tank features small fish, Sea Stars, Hermit Crabs, Pencil Urchins and other invertebrates, allowing guests to cross the water/air border.

The new Flower Garden Banks Exhibit highlights a hidden gem from the Gulf of Mexico and brings attention to the unique tropical coral reef system found just 115 miles offshore. With help from the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, guests experience the East Flower Garden Bank, West Flower Garden Bank and Stetson Bank up close and personal. The exhibit includes examples of Brain, Star and Elkhorn coral, to name a few, all of which can be seen on the banks. The Flower Garden Banks reef system is one of the healthiest in the Gulf and Caribbean regions.

Guests are completely immersed in the Caribbean Exhibit with breathtaking views as sharks, rays and other tropical fish swim overhead while they walk through the tunnel in this one million-gallon exhibit, giving them the sense of diving in the Caribbean. New to the exhibit is The Pride, a 19th century rum-runner shipwreck replica, loosely based on the vessel sailed by famed Galveston pirate Jean Lafitte. Divers spent a total of 68.5 hours underwater putting together the ship, which arrived in about 75 individual pieces.

Also new are in-water presentations by Moody Gardens divers. With additions to the exhibit, guests are bound to have questions. Divers are now able to take and answers questions while in the exhibit.

North Pacific Gallery

The North Pacific Gallery focuses on the high-energy coastline to the west. Playful Seals and Sea Lions are featured prominently alongside other kelp forest inhabitants including Leopard Sharks and the long-lived Rockfish. Jewel aquariums highlight the coastal surge zone, ingenious Giant Pacific Octopus and the relatively unknown deep water coral communities that act as nursery habitat for many commercial fisheries.

And, that's not all

Don't miss out on the whimsical and colorful array of soft-bodied predators inside the new Jellyfish Gallery. Lights, sounds and textures further enhance the display of these free swimming coral relatives.

There's also the South Pacific Biome that showcases the tremendous diversity that is found in the epicenter of the coral reef evolution. Colorful corals, invertebrates, fishes and sharks fill the niche habitats highlighted in the large and small aquarium features. Guests are able to engage with aquarium staff as they perform essential functions in the working conservation lab. Watch and ask questions as they work in the nursery, perform aquarium water quality tests, necropsies, grow algae as a food source and other functions in their daily lab work.

Exhibits will not only inspire visitor interest and empathy, but also connect visitors to specific ocean habitats, further establishing the Moody Gardens Aquarium Pyramid as the largest and most diverse aquarium in the southwest.

For more information about Moody Gardens call 409-744-4673 or visit www.moodygardens.org.

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