



Seahorse Exhibit to Celebrate “a Living Lafayette”

*Zoo Announcement 11 a.m. Nov. 7 to Highlight
Celebration of Progress with Lafayette River Clean Up*

Media Release

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When Baltimore’s National Aquarium began displaying seahorses, the Baltimore Sun called the result **“one of the most successful exhibits ever staged at an aquarium in the United States.”** Aquarium attendance increased at least 30 percent.

The Virginia Zoo in Norfolk is imagining an exhibit as pleasing for zoo visitors when **“Seahorses of the Living Lafayette” opens in spring 2016.** The new exhibit will celebrate community-wide progress with restoring the environmental health of the Lafayette branch of the Elizabeth River.

“Seahorses are just one of the many forms of marine life that scientists are now finding in abundance in the Lafayette, thanks to the efforts of many organizations and individuals,” said Marjorie Mayfield Jackson, Executive Director of the non-profit Elizabeth River Project, which in 2009 began organizing the community to restore the Lafayette. **“But the little seahorse is the creature that has captured the hearts of the public.”**

The zoo will announce the new exhibit at the start of an **11 am – 12:30 celebration on Friday, Nov. 7, hosted by Elizabeth River Project in the Zoo’s pavilion to thank community partners for progress with bringing back the health of the Lafayette branch of the Elizabeth River.** (The VIP/media event is by special invitation and is not open to the public). Elizabeth River Project will present “Living Lafayette 2014” awards to seven organizations for achievements ranging from growing 11 million young oysters for six new oyster reefs in the Lafayette, to dozens of wetlands restorations, thousands of citizen environmental stewards recruited, \$182 million in city sewer upgrades and \$200 million in HRSD upgrades to sewage treatment plants near the mouth of the Lafayette. Norfolk Mayor Paul D. Fraim will be among those making brief remarks.

With nearly a mile of shoreline and almost 500,000 visitors a year, Virginia Zoo is the largest public education facility on the Lafayette branch of the Elizabeth. “That makes the zoo such a great partner to

build even more momentum for cleaning up the Lafayette,” said Jackson. While the Lafayette is showing significant improvement, annual algal blooms mean there is much work yet to do.

“The partnership between the Virginia Zoo and the Elizabeth River Project will help both organizations educate a wider audience about what simple steps people can do at home to help with the conservation of natural habitats,” said Greg Bockheim, Executive Director, Virginia Zoo. “Our goal is to help all of our Zoo members become River Star Homes to further the environmental nurturing for the rivers and water resources around us.”

Sponsored jointly by the zoo and the Elizabeth River Project, the Seahorses of the Living Lafayette project will be part of renovations to the Zoo’s Exhibit Building expected to be completed in the spring of 2016. Already recognized as one of 26 Lafayette branch “River Star Businesses” with the Elizabeth River Project for earlier conservation efforts including a wetland restoration, the zoo also will host construction by Elizabeth River Project of a new oyster reef in 2015 and will become the first satellite recruiting station for the Elizabeth River Project’s “River Star Homes” program, launched on the Lafayette in 2011 to recruit citizen stewards of the river and now 2,250 homes strong.

“The seahorse is one of nature’s most startling creations,” says Catherine Wallis, explaining the public fascination with seahorses in her book, *Seahorses: Mysteries of the Oceans*. “The creature is a fish, but has the head of a horse and wears a crown. It has a tail, but a curly one like a monkey’s, and instead of scales a suit of armor plating... In a most unfishlike and contrary manner, the seahorse swims upright, its progress slow and ponderous. Yet its fins are as delicate as a fairy’s wings and move so fast they are almost invisible.”

People who want to support the Seahorses of the Living Lafayette, renovations to the Zoo’s Exhibit Building and the new oyster reef can visit either organization’s website and make a donation.

As an accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facility, the Virginia Zoo exhibits more than 400 animals on 53 beautifully landscaped acres. For more than a century, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation, and offered a fun-filled day for visitors of any age. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at 3500 Granby Street in Norfolk. Daily admission prices are \$11 for adults, \$10 for seniors (age 62 and over) and \$9 for children ages 2-11. Children under 2 admitted free! Visit www.virginiazoo.org or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.

The Elizabeth River Project is a non-profit organization founded in 1993 with the mission to restore the Elizabeth River to the highest practical level of environmental quality through business, government and citizen partnerships. In the organization’s River Star Homes program, residents of the Elizabeth River area earn a free yard flag when they agree to seven simple steps. Find your river restoration role today: www.elizabethriver.org, 757-399-7487.

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