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**For Immediate Release**

**Media Contacts:**

Melissa Holland, Shedd Aquarium  
312-692-3330 or [mholland@sheddaquarium.org](mailto:mholland@sheddaquarium.org)

or

Emily Mason, PCI  
312-558-1770 ext. 136 or [emason@pcipr.com](mailto:emason@pcipr.com)

**SHEDD AQUARIUM: 75 YEARS OF FIRSTS AND FAVORITES**

From the day it opened in 1930, Shedd Aquarium set a new standard for aquariums around the world. It was the first inland aquarium to maintain a permanent exhibition of both freshwater and saltwater fishes. Today, it remains the largest indoor aquarium in the world.

The transformation began in 1924 to turn a landfill site on Lake Michigan's shoreline into a world-class aquarium. That was the year John Graves Shedd, one of Chicago's prominent civic and business leaders, bestowed a \$2 million gift to construct the Shedd Aquarium. A year later, when budget considerations threatened to scale back the size and quality of the building, Shedd increased his gift to \$3 million. While John G. Shedd did not live to see the aquarium finished, his name remains synonymous with the institution that has garnered international respect as one of the world's finest aquariums.

A self-made millionaire, the Marshall Field & Company executive had traveled a long way from his humble beginnings as the son of a New Hampshire farmer. He moved to Chicago in 1872 and would have a 44-year association with Marshall Field's growing retail empire. He rose steadily through the ranks, succeeding Field as the company president in 1906; in 1923, he became board chairman.

Shedd was among a group of civic-minded business leaders who vigorously supported the city's cultural growth. In determining a lasting gift to Chicago, Shedd consulted with his peers, who agreed that every truly cosmopolitan city in the United States and Europe had a fine aquarium. Naturally, Chicago must have one, and it must have the best!

In 1924, the newly formed Shedd Aquarium Society entered an agreement with the Chicago Park District to build on a vacant site at the end of 12th Street (now Roosevelt Road). Located next to the Field Museum, the aquarium would help anchor the transformation of a city landfill into a campus of world-class museums.

The society commissioned the architectural firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. In autumn of 1925, a firm engineer and the aquarium's newly appointed assistant director toured the leading aquariums in European cities, including Naples, Monaco, Nice, Paris, Frankfurt, Berlin and London, to study their design, construction and management. To build

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Shedd Aquarium, the best of these classic designs was combined with state-of-the-art water filtration systems, spacious work areas for the animal-care staff and wide viewing spaces for aquarium guests.

Because of delays in obtaining exhibit materials and saltwater, which had to be shipped in railroad cars from Florida, there were no animals in Shedd Aquarium when it opened in December 1929. But the anticipation among Chicago's residents was at such a frenzy that they still flocked to the new aquarium to marvel at the 300-foot diameter octagonal Beaux Arts building covered with white Georgia marble.

Shedd Aquarium was officially opened on May 30, 1930. It contained the greatest variety of sea life ever exhibited at one institution. Six galleries of aquatic animal displays radiated from the central rotunda, which then housed a 40-foot tropical swamp.

When the last of the galleries was completed and all the exhibits were open to the public in 1931, Shedd Aquarium recorded its highest-ever attendance of 4.7 million people.

In 1971, the central tropical pool was replaced with the *Caribbean Reef*, a \$1.2 million exhibit highlighting hundreds of colorful Caribbean fishes on a re-created tropical reef. The exhibit remains an aquarium highlight today.

Shedd Aquarium's magnificent *Oceanarium*, which is home to beluga whales, sea otters, Pacific white-sided dolphins and penguins, is the world's largest indoor marine mammal habitat. Built on an additional 1.8 acres of lakefill, when the Oceanarium opened in 1991, it nearly doubled the size of the original Aquarium.

*Amazon Rising: Seasons of the River* opened in 2000. The exhibit takes guests on a journey through the year on the Amazon River floodplain, from the dry season, through the months of floods, and on to when the waters recede. During that time, guests can see how piranhas, stingrays, sideneck turtles, caimans, tarantulas, boa constrictors, migratory songbirds and a host of other animals – as well as the local people – take advantage of the cycle of the mighty river.

*Wild Reef*, a major permanent exhibit highlighting the Philippine coral reefs, opened in 2003. This \$45 million exhibit holds 750,000 gallons of water, more than doubling the aquarium's original capacity to 1.2 million gallons. While the exhibit has around 1 million animals (counting all the coral polyps), the stars are the more than 20 sharks in the 400,000-gallon, floor-to-ceiling shark habitat.

Throughout its 75-year history, Shedd Aquarium has masterfully combined the best of both worlds: the charm and majesty of its classical setting with state-of-the-art technology in caring for an unprecedented diversity of aquatic life. It has achieved dozens of milestones and first-ever events. Yet the world-class facility keeps its personal touch: Millions of guests think of Shedd as "their aquarium," and return again and again to visit their favorite animal or exhibit inside the Aquarium's great bronze doors. Today, Shedd welcomes nearly 2 million visitors each year, cares for more than 22,000 animals and is a leader in wildlife conservation around the world.