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PACIFIC SEAS AQUARIUM CONSTRUCTION REACHES MAJOR MILESTONE AS CRANE LOWERS GIANT ACRYLIC VIEWING WINDOW INTO PLACE

The panel – almost 35 feet long, weighing nearly 12 tons – will give visitors a chance to come nose-to-nose with the hammerhead sharks, green sea turtles and eagle rays that will inhabit the Baja Bay exhibit

TACOMA, Wash. – It was a huge undertaking. A massive window. A precision placement. And it all went swimmingly.



A wave of excitement washed over Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Wednesday as a 157-foot-tall construction crane carefully lowered a massive acrylic panel “demi-tunnel” into place inside the new Pacific Seas Aquarium.

The nearly 35-foot-long, curved sheet of crystal clear acrylic will provide a window into the world of hammerhead sharks, green sea turtles, spotted eagle rays and other tropical animals that will live in the Baja Bay exhibit of the 35,000-square-foot aquarium, which is due to open next summer at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

A crane hoists a 12-ton acrylic window up and over the rear wall of the new Pacific Seas Aquarium at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Wednesday morning. It will be the window into Baja Bay, a new home to hammerhead sharks, green sea turtles, spotted eagle rays and other sea animals.

Its placement in an operation that featured huge machinery, precise measurements and a choreographed construction ballet marks a major milestone toward the completion of the new aquarium.

“We broke ground on the Pacific Seas Aquarium just over a year ago,” zoo Deputy Director John Houck said. “We have eagerly watched as footings went in, walls were formed and concrete was poured. We’ve noted progress with each passing day, but the installation of this piece was truly an occasion to stop, watch and celebrate. We can’t wait until next summer when we begin expanding on the many conservation stories of our seas, from cold waters of Alaska down to the warm waters of the Baja Peninsula.



“We remain grateful to the visionary voters of Tacoma, who approved a Metro Parks Tacoma bond issue three years ago to make this aquarium and dozens of other projects across the city a reality,” Houck added.

The window installed on Wednesday weighs nearly 12 tons and will sit at the heart of the \$51.6 million Pacific Seas Aquarium, a replacement for the now 54-year-old North Pacific Aquarium. With its “demi-tunnel” design that will allow visitors to look up and see fish swimming over their heads, this one water window is likely to capture the hearts of visitors, too.

The hammerhead sharks, green sea turtles and eagle rays – all newcomers to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium - will swim in Baja Bay, the 250,000-gallon centerpiece of the new building.

The window, manufactured by Reynolds Polymer Technology, Inc., Grand Junction, Colo., arrived by truck at the entrance to Point Defiance Park in the early morning hours. A crew of flaggers guided the truck on a slow-motion, hour-plus ride through the park until it arrived at its destination inside the construction zone.

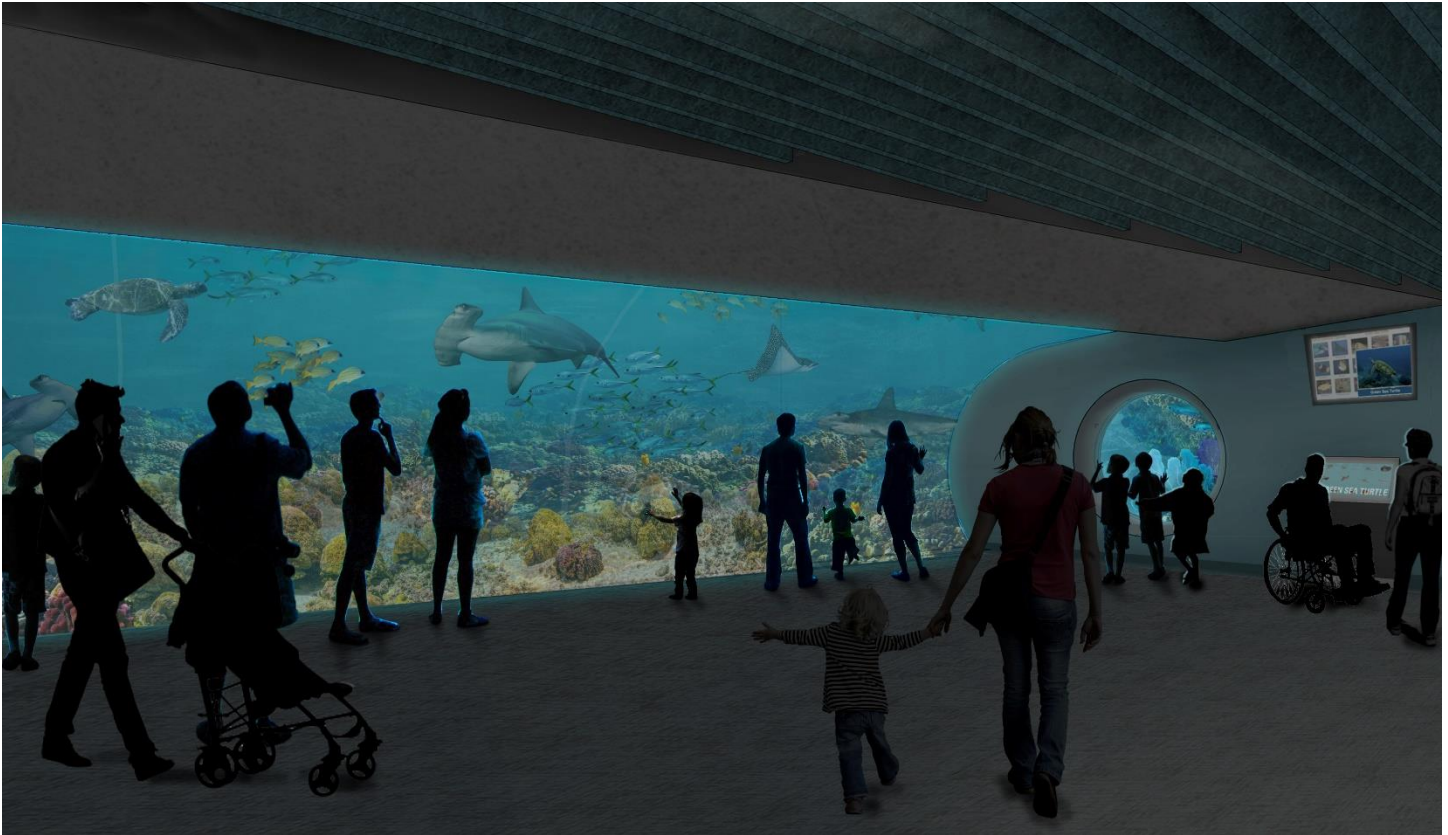
Another painstaking process slowly unleashed the acrylic panel from its steel shipping crate, then hooked it to a crane so it could be carefully hoisted aloft some 70 feet, up and over the aquarium building under construction. All the while, work crews made incremental adjustments so that the window could be lowered, inch by inch, into its final position.

The window clears the top of the wall about 70 feet high before being lowered into the portion of the Pacific Seas Aquarium that will be home to the Baja Bay exhibit. The curved “demi-tunnel” will provide visitors with an immersive experience as fish swim above them.

But even with all that precision, the final act of hoisting the panel, swinging it into place and lowering it into position took only about two minutes. Construction crews positioned inside the building, however, took much longer to ensure the 6-inch-thick window was correctly set into place, where it will form one of the watertight sides of that huge exhibit.

In addition to the inhabitants of Baja Bay, the new Pacific Seas Aquarium will include new homes for the species that now reside in the North Pacific Aquarium - including a giant Pacific octopus and several kinds of jellyfish.

The existing South Pacific Aquarium, which is home to 16 large sharks of five different species, as well as smaller sharks, stingrays and other fish, will remain open. The popular Eye-to-Eye Shark Dive program will continue there.



An architect's rendering shows visitors watching scalloped hammerhead sharks, green sea turtles and spotted eagle rays in the Baja Bay exhibit of the new Pacific Seas Aquarium at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. It is slated to open in the summer of 2018.

Visitors to the new aquarium will enter alongside an outdoor Tidal Surge exhibit, where moving waves will course through a habitat teeming with sea stars, anemones and urchins. They'll stroll past schools of herring racing around a circular tank with a 4-foot tall, 7-foot wide viewing window. They'll get a glimpse of the sea life that lurks beneath the ruins of "Gallop Gertie," the first Tacoma Narrows Bridge, which twisted apart and collapsed into Puget Sound in 1940. They'll see jellyfish, giant Japanese spider crabs and more as they continue their journey toward Baja Bay.

The new aquarium is being built on a spot between the zoo's Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater and the Rocky Shores area, home to marine mammals like Pacific walrus, California sea lions, harbor seals and sea otters.

It's the largest capital project in the 112-year history of Metro Parks Tacoma. It is funded largely from the \$198 million bond issue approved by voters in 2014.

Turner Construction is the general contractor and construction manager for the project.

For more information, go to www.pdza.org/new-aquarium.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

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