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Sea Center on Stearns Wharf Reopens March 12

Guests invited to explore the underwater world of the Santa Barbara Channel

(Santa Barbara, CA) — After six months of work, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center on Stearns Wharf is reopening on March 12 with infrastructure upgrades and a refreshed upstairs exhibit. The reinterpreted upstairs space, titled [*Dive In: Our Changing Channel*](#), will guide visitors through the underwater world of the Santa Barbara Channel while highlighting its unique marine residents and diverse habitats.

Director of Exhibits Frank Hein explains, “We think the public will be excited and surprised to explore the underwater secrets of the Santa Barbara Channel, and discover how dramatically what we can’t see impacts the ecology of our entire region.”

Upstairs, guests will encounter favorite Sea Center animals—like Moon Jellies, a Two-spot Octopus, a California Moray, and Giant Pacific Seahorses—in an exhibit now enriched with more information about the ecology of kelp forests, rocky reefs, and seagrass meadows. The new interpretation emphasizes how the geography of the coast and channel affects relationships between animals, habitats, and humans. Guests can model the depths of the channel using an interactive augmented reality sandbox.

The reopening marks a new phase in the Sea Center’s long history of bringing marine science and nature education to Stearns Wharf. This year is the 150th anniversary of the wharf, which was a working industrial pier before the 1973 fire transformed its future. At that time, the City of Santa Barbara’s new plan for the wharf included space for nonprofit use, and the Sea Center was born in 1986.

Since its earliest days, the Sea Center has taken a strong and consistent approach of drawing on the expertise of Museum scientists and Sea Center staff to share information about our marine ecosystems as part of a very real effort to protect the exceptional resources of our near shore habitats. Wildlife benefit from these efforts and so do local families, students, and guests attracted to Stearns Wharf from all over the world.

Luke Swetland, President & CEO of the Museum and Sea Center noted, “In the face of both human and climate change impacts such as sea level rise, ocean warming, and acidification, the mission of the Sea Center to promote better understanding and appreciation of the Santa Barbara Channel’s rich but fragile diversity has never been more critical.”

“We hope repeat visitors to the newly-reopened space will enjoy their favorite activities and notice some of the improvements. Less obvious improvements—like a safe, waterproof, and energy-efficient building—will help ensure the Sea Center continues to serve in the decades to come, as it has for over 30 years,” shares Sea Center Director Richard Smalldon.

Guests planning a visit can consult sbnature.org/seacenter and sbnature.org/visit/hours/ for more information.

About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center

Located on historic Stearns Wharf, this highly interactive regional aquarium and marine education facility offers guests close encounters with marine animals, and exploration of the Santa Barbara Channel on the Wet Deck. In addition to permanent exhibits, the Sea Center hosts unique events and special educational programming, including Underwater Parks Day, World Oceans Day, and the *Live Dive* series. Visit sbnature.org/seacenter for more information.



Giant Pacific Seahorse



California Moray



Two-spot Octopus