

# Long Beach residents treasure assignments at new Mississippi Aquarium

By Andy Kanengiser

The Mississippi Aquarium inspires learning, a passion for the sea world and research. The world-class facility is also attracting Long Beach residents to serve in key leadership roles.

The 2020 grand opening of the multi-million dollar aquarium along U.S. 90 in Gulfport is expected to be a big plus for tourism and economic development along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The facility is drawing newcomers to Long Beach, like Meredith Horn, the aquarium's vice president of the guest experience.

Horn and her husband discovered nearby Long Beach was the perfect place to put down Gulf Coast roots.

"When we visited for the first time to tour the area, we knew immediately that we were home."

"We love the friendly vibe. People were very kind in this area. They are always willing to lend a helping hand," Horn said.

With beaches, fishing on scenic piers, outstanding public schools, quaint downtown shops along Jeff Davis Avenue, restaurants and a fam-

ily-friendly atmosphere, Long Beach offers plenty of selling points. The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Park campus sits in the Friendly City.

Andy Horn, curator of marine mammals at the Mississippi Aquarium, agrees with Meredith. "It's a great area with a lot of spacious, friendly quiet neighborhoods," he said.

"I probably spend most of my free time on the beach walkways enjoying a walk or run. I love living right by the Gulf."

When newcomers decide to call Long Beach home, that's good news to Mayor George Bass, Long Beach Chamber of Commerce leaders, local merchants, real estate folks and many more.

The aquarium's vice president of animal care and conservation, Ric Urban is another key staffer recently settling in the Long Beach.

"Long Beach is a friendly little beach community with a great town

green," Urban said. The Harper McCaughan Town Green is home to Long Beach Live concerts and sits nearby the Farmers Market on Saturday mornings. Festive decorations illuminate the town green as the Christmas holidays near. It's pretty easy to navigate the downtown area on foot, bike, car or other modes of transportation.

"I enjoy taking my golf cart to downtown Long Beach and going to events and dining at different restaurants," Urban said.

The wait for the aquarium to open across from Jones Park won't be much longer. Aquarium officials announced new details regarding the opening on Facebook Live July 17.

Mississippi Aquarium leaders are making pitches to attract visitors as well as future volunteers. The innovative facility supports animal research and conservation, while serving as the window to the waters of Mississippi, the Gulf

Coast and beyond.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mississippi Aquarium is a bright spot as the state reopens following spring shutdowns ignited by the spread of the virus.

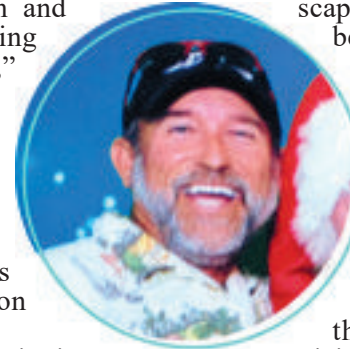
The Gulf Coast facility offers so much to see for visitors – from the work of local artists at the gift shop to tanks filled with fish, big and small.

The nonprofit sits on 5.8 acres of land. The aquarium contains over 80,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor exhibits connected by landscaped walkways. There will be plants displayed from all the physiographic regions of Mississippi.

The new aquarium figures to be a popular destination point for people from Mississippi and states across America. Gulf Coast residents on staff say they will be happy to let visitors know more about the aquatic jewel situated a few miles from Long Beach.

To get involved and become a member, visit [www.msaquarium.org/membership](http://www.msaquarium.org/membership). Those interested can also connect by following the Mississippi Aquarium on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.

All photos by Lindy Shoales



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