



Great Lakes
AQUARIUM

Lake Superior Center Authority
2023 Annual Report to the Legislature

Submitted January 2024

Pursuant to Minn. Stat. 85B.06; 1990 Minn. Laws Chap. 535
Sec. 6 Lake Superior Center Authority must submit an annual report to
the legislature detailing the activities, funding and organizational
operations for Lake Superior Center dba Great Lakes Aquarium.

On behalf of the Lake Superior Center Authority, we are delighted to present the 2023 annual report highlighting the accomplishments of Lake Superior Center, doing business as Great Lakes Aquarium. It has been a year of remarkable success, welcoming a total of 214,500 visitors to the aquarium from January to December 2023. This attendance figure sets a new record since opening in 2000.

Throughout the year, our guests had the opportunity to engage in safe and personal interactions with a diverse range of animals, participated in educational classes, joined various events, and enjoyed socializing with friends, family, and the wider public within our dynamic learning space. The positive experiences shared by our visitors reflect the impact and significance of the Great Lakes Aquarium in fostering a vibrant and enriching community

Great Lakes Aquarium currently employs 30 full-time staff and 44 part-time staff. These numbers vary seasonally. Additional information related to funding sources, assets, liabilities, and administrative expenses is attached to this letter (Appendix A).

Aquarium staff have initiated the development of new exhibits set to open within the next two years. The "Oceans Alive" exhibit, which concentrates on aquatic habitats worldwide and explores the impacts of climate change, is scheduled to open in the spring of 2024. Preliminary work has commenced on an updated exhibit gallery to replace the current one dedicated to the origins of the Great Lakes. The forthcoming exhibit, titled "Lava to Lakes," will spotlight significant events that altered the landscape, as well as the flora and fauna of the Great Lakes region and Minnesota, set to open in 2025. More information on these projects can be found attached with this document (Appendix B)

This year has witnessed a notable surge in educational visitation, with over 10,000 of students actively participating in programs and exploring the aquarium. Due to the diligent work of our staff, these numbers have returned to pre-COVID levels. Further details about our programs and initiatives can be found in the attached document (Appendix B).

The Aquarium is experiencing substantial growth in memberships, with a notable increase of over 16% compared to 2022. A significant portion of these memberships are family memberships, indicating that guests recognize the value of a secure and enjoyable learning environment where they can bring their families to interact, engage, and learn collectively.

The future looks to be exciting as new features, new partnerships and new resources strengthen the Aquarium's positive impact on the region and the State of Minnesota. Please feel free to contact us for additional information at any time.

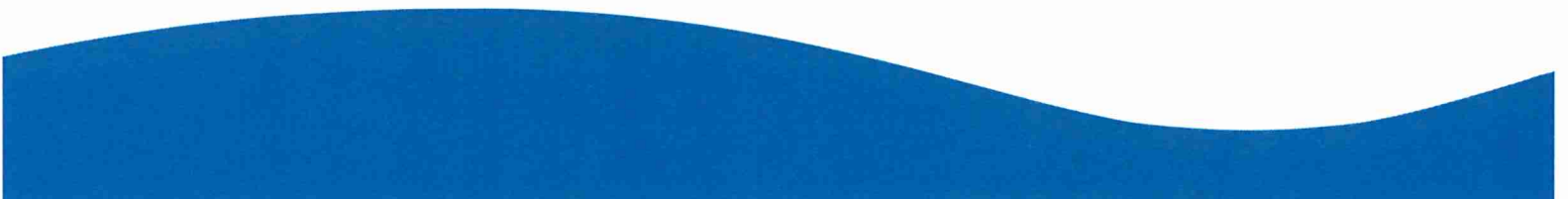
Sincerely,



Jay Walker
Executive Director
Great Lakes Aquarium



Elaine Hansen
Chair
Lake Superior Center Authority



Appendix A – 2023 Financial Statements

Income Statement

	Jan - Dec 23
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
4000 · Admissions	2,268,844.45
4050 · Membership Income	273,483.68
4400 · Education Income	168,262.47
4200 · Donations	70,467.10
4300 · Retail Sales	844,313.63
4250 · Facility Rental \ Special Event	132,804.45
4600 · Parking Income	215,219.13
4500 · Miscellaneous	42,155.23
Total Income	4,015,550.14
Cost of Goods Sold	
6000 · Cost of Sales	425,041.97
6710 · Freight Charges, Product	26,234.41
Total COGS	451,276.38
Gross Profit	3,564,273.76
Expense	
51100 · Freight and Shipping Costs	0.08
5100 · Admin. - Expenses	166,205.35
5101 · Admin Payroll	339,747.13
5200 · Education - Expenses	25,063.91
5201 · Education - Payroll	531,983.71
5300 · Husbandry - Expenses	169,509.73
5301 · Husbandry - Payroll	667,743.80
5400 · Operations -Facility- Expenses	618,118.57
5401 · Operations -Facility-Payroll	406,811.51
5700 · Operations-General Expense	250,935.09
5701 · Operations-Guest ServicePayroll	310,517.76
5500 · Facility Rental / Special Event	19,367.18
5600 · Store - Expenses	18,094.31
5601 · Store - Payroll	67,881.08
Total Expense	3,591,979.21
Net Ordinary Income	-27,705.45
Other Income/Expense	
Other Income	
7000 · Purchase Discounts	2,575.07
7100 · Tourism Tax Operational Support	340,000.00
Total Other Income	342,575.07
Other Expense	
9045 · Oceans Alive	0.00
9041 · Second Floor Remodel (Origins)	0.00
9003 · Changing Exhibit Expenses	0.00
Total Other Expense	0.00
Net Other Income	342,575.07
Net Income	<u>314,869.62</u>

*See note on page 4.

Appendix A – 2023 Financial Statements

Balance Sheet

	<u>Dec 31, 23</u>
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
1000 · Cash and Cash Equivalents	698,395.38
Total Checking/Savings	698,395.38
Accounts Receivable	
1150 · Accounts Receivable	23,591.75
Total Accounts Receivable	23,591.75
Other Current Assets	
1300 · Other Current Assets	151,318.33
1380 · Undeposited Funds	52,900.05
Total Other Current Assets	204,218.38
Total Current Assets	926,205.51
Fixed Assets	
1200 · Fixed Assets	3,608,573.34
1250 · Accumulated Depreciation	-2,177,072.41
Total Fixed Assets	1,431,500.93
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>2,357,706.44</u>
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	
2007 · Accounts Payable, General	89,255.54
Total Accounts Payable	89,255.54
Credit Cards	
2700 · Employee Credit Cards	21,456.06
Total Credit Cards	21,456.06
Other Current Liabilities	
2530 · Capital Lease Payable-Current	2,973.96
2500 · Other Current Liabilities	231,071.99
2900 · Deferred Revenue	163,992.21
2520 · City Revolving Loan Payable	100,000.00
Total Other Current Liabilities	498,038.16
Total Current Liabilities	608,749.76
Long Term Liabilities	
2300 · Long Term Liabilities	542,073.82
2301 · Capital Lease Payable	11,432.37
Total Long Term Liabilities	553,506.19
Total Liabilities	1,162,255.95
Equity	
3001 · Fund Balance	-635,517.45
3200 · Unrestricted Net Assets	1,516,098.32
Net Income	314,869.62
Total Equity	1,195,450.49
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u>2,357,706.44</u>

*Income carried forward from 2022 to replace roof. This project was carried over due to delays in materials and scheduling conflicts.

Appendix B—2023 Accomplishments

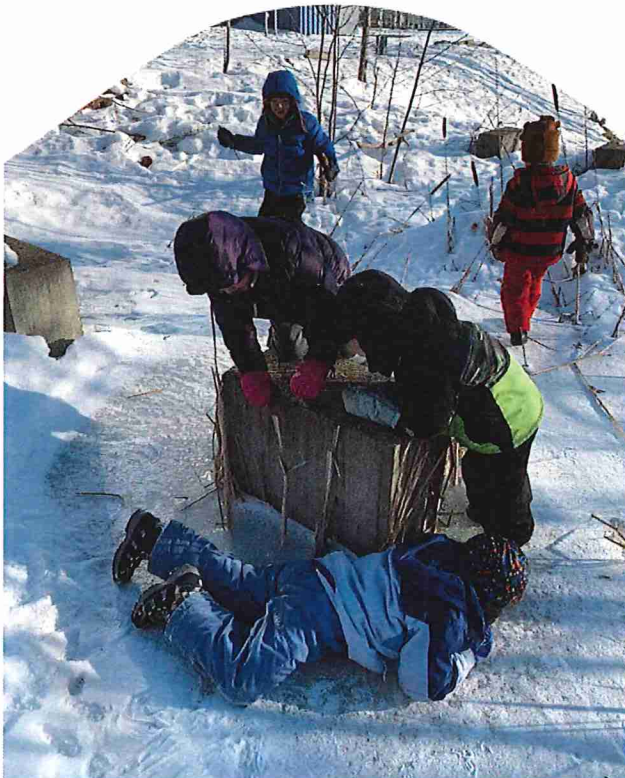
The following list show cases some of the efforts and success at the Great Lakes Aquarium this past year.

1) Community Learning, Visitor Engagement, and Exhibit Development

GLA provides on-site and outreach educational programming to learners of all ages. Daily interpretive programs give guests the opportunity to learn more about resident animals while watching them eat, play, or interact with our staff. Classes and formal programming are provided to youth, while teacher workshops and visiting speakers provide enriching experiences for adults. Outreach programs bring the wonder of GLA to the community, especially those for

2023 Accomplishments:

- ◇ 13,000 pre-k—12th grade students participated in onsite programming.
- ◇ 2,885 volunteer hours were served.
- ◇ 12,200 animal encounters
- ◇ 100+ teaching kits were lent out to regional educators, free of charge.
- ◇ 177 adults and 156 children participating in Duluth public schools Early Childhood Family Education program visited through a grant.
- ◇ 181 campers participated in summer day camp programs.
- ◇ 1,252.5 early childhood education contact hours
- ◇ Added new interactive American Crow interpretive program.
- ◇ Exhibits team along with Husbandry and Operations installed new *Wild Neighbors* exhibit gallery on the second floor.
- ◇ Developed exhibit plan and secured funding for 2024 *Oceans Alive* gallery renovation.
- ◇ Pitched and secured Legacy Arts and Cultural Heritage Funding for brand new *Lava to Lakes* exhibit opening in 2025.
- ◇ Collaborated with Blue Rhino Studio, Minnesota based leaders in science based artistic design, to fabricate scale models of ancient sea creature for upcoming *Lava to Lakes* build.

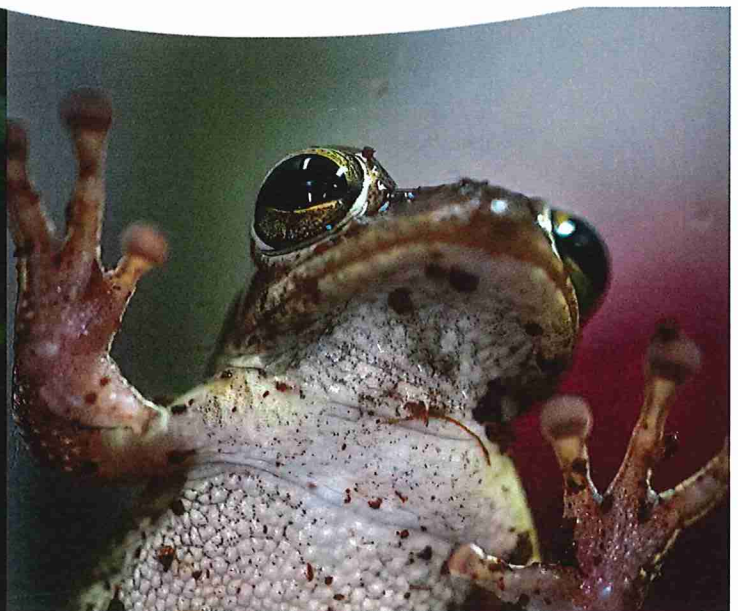


2) Exhibits/Husbandry/Facilities

Great Lakes Aquarium features individual animals from over 400 unique species found within the Great Lakes Basin, other freshwater ecosystems, and saltwater habitats.

Accomplishments 2023

- ◇ Updated life support systems (i.e. water quality maintenance and upkeep) to increase efficiency and reduce energy consumption.
- ◇ Added new animals to the Aquarium collection including: alligators, striped skunks, and a hedgehog. This is the first time since the pandemic that we are able to resume work with state departments to collect aquatic animals. The Isle Royal exhibit showcasing Lake Superior species of fish received lake trout, Atlantic salmon and brook trout.
- ◇ We continued to update our quarantine area with new aquariums and updated life support systems. These additions create a more efficient use of space, as well as an ability to meet increased demand from new and upcoming exhibits.
- ◇ Finished construction on a gender neutral bathroom/Locker room. This project also included updating the staff and volunteer breakroom.
- ◇ Installed a new roof.
- ◇ Built habitats and added animals to the “Wild Neighbors” display.
- ◇ Ordered equipment and aquariums for the “Oceans Alive” gallery.



3) Development, Marketing and Strategic Planning

GLA is committed to increasing support for the Aquarium by re-engaging with individuals and the funding community, planning for its long-term future, and maintaining a brand that supports its mission and is easily identifiable to the public.

2023 Accomplishments:

- ◇ The Aquarium has fostered a continuing relationship with WDIO-TV's afternoon lifestyle program, The Lift. Once a month, a staff member and feature animal(s) are showcased in a two-minute segment called "In Otter News..."
- ◇ Our annual branding campaign "A Touch Closer" chose to focus on touch and other hands-on experiences at the Aquarium since we did not open a new exhibit in 2023. It proved to be extremely successful, helping us break an attendance record of 2022 by nearly 14,000 visitors.
- ◇ A new coordinating team from our Husbandry department is running the Aquarium's social media with support from the marketing director. The focus is on Facebook and Instagram with an emphasis on stories, reels and posts. The Aquarium surpassed 10,000 followers on Instagram over the summer, which has been a strategic plan goal. Four reels in total have gone viral with international reach.
- ◇ Aquarium directors and exhibit design coordinator worked with design firm The Cultural North to develop logo and branding design for *Oceans Alive* exhibit opening in 2024.
- ◇ Earned media highlights in 2023 included a segment on Twin Cities Live! featuring a reporter feeding sturgeon in our touchpool while interviewing an aquarist, and a front page story on the Aquarium's record attendance and exhibit plans in the Saturday, December 30 edition of the Duluth News-Tribune.



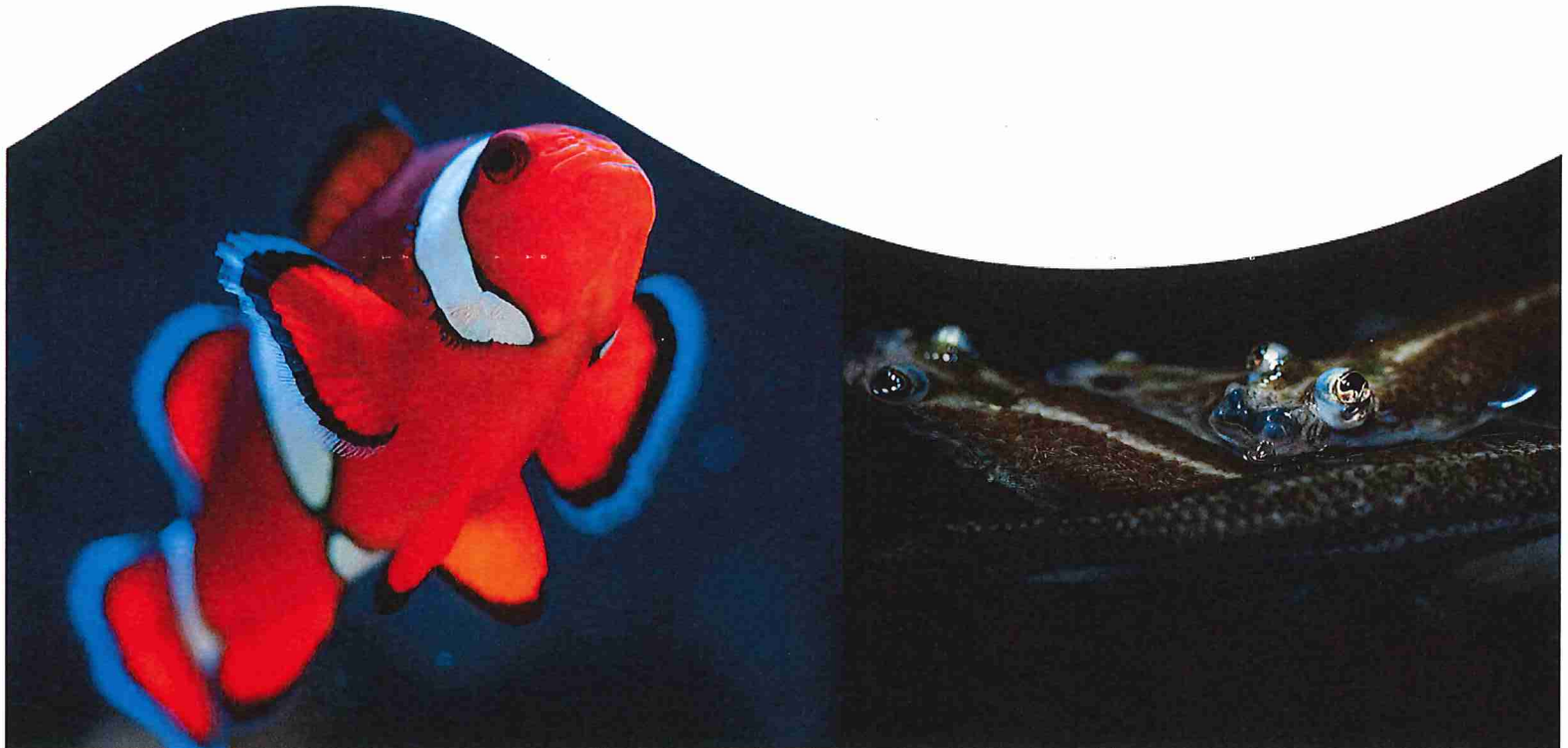
(4) Inclusion and Accessibility

At the Aquarium, we are committed to creating a culture of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility for visitors, employees, volunteers, and other stakeholders of the organization. This is both to create the best experience possible for all visitors and to create a workplace that allows staff and volunteers to thrive. In order to make these values a reality, GLA has outlined inclusion and accessibility as objectives in our current strategic plan, including a staff and board committee. This has allowed us to create the time and space to begin researching and aligning our attention to areas of opportunity and action.

Efforts around inclusion, accessibility, and equity are vital to helping us advance our mission and ensuring all people have the opportunity for a meaningful and educational experience at our organization. Our vision is to be a unique destination for people from across Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the greater mid-west region, by creating experiences for people with different needs, abilities, and resources.

2023 Accomplishments

- ◇ Gender neutral locker room completed for staff and volunteers
- ◇ A Community Engagement Committee has been established to lead initiatives aimed at addressing the inclusion and accessibility requirements of both our visitors and the broader community. This committee will formulate goals and provide guidance for upcoming projects, ensuring that they align with our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.



(5) Guest Services:

Guest services are responsible for the overall visitor experience, ensuring that guests have a memorable and enjoyable time while also promoting education and conservation efforts. Guest services includes: admissions, memberships, special events and activities, gift store, and community engagement.

2023 accomplishments

- Guest Services began the transition from Quickbooks POS to Shopify, to improve customer experience and reporting capabilities.
- Events hosted 11,400 guests for weddings, corporate meetings, holiday parties, birthday celebrations, and other get-togethers.
- We created the Community Engagement Committee with GLA board assistance to expand the Aquarium's presence in the community through outreach tailored to reach new groups. This work includes curating a list of community engagement projects to participate in and accomplish over the next few years.
- Membership purchases grew by 290 memberships (12.0%) and visits increased by 16.1% from 2022 to 2023. Member visits accounted for 18.2% of our attendance in 2023.
- After struggling with labor shortages since 2021, Guest Services, Events, and the Gift Store returned to full staffing in fall of 2023. Guest Services, Events, and the Gift Store comprise the largest department at the Aquarium, with four full-time and 28 part-time staff. For many of these staff, working as a GLA Guest Services Representative is their first job and a great learning experience. Overall turnover in this department dropped by almost 9% in 2023 to 46%. (The Bureau of Labor reports that the tourism and hospitality industry's turnover is typically 70-80%.)
- Despite the cultural shift to virtual communication, post cards remain a top seller in the Gift Store. In 2023, we sold 2644 of them!

