



Great Lakes
AQUARIUM

Lake Superior Center Authority

2024 Annual Report to the Legislature

Submitted March 2025

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 pleased to present the 2024 Annual Report, highlighting the accomplishments of Lake Superior Center, doing business as Great Lakes Aquarium. This year marked another milestone, with a record-breaking attendance of 225,500 visitors from January to December 2024—the fourth consecutive year of record-setting attendance since our opening in 2000.

Throughout the year, guests engaged in meaningful and personal interactions with a diverse range of animals, participated in educational programs, attended special events, and connected with family, friends, and the community in our dynamic learning space. These experiences reflect the Aquarium's ongoing commitment to fostering an engaging and enriching environment for all.

Great Lakes Aquarium currently employs 30 full-time and 44 part-time staff, with seasonal variations. Additional details on funding sources, assets, liabilities, and administrative expenses are included in Appendix A.

One of the year's highlights was the opening of the Oceans Alive exhibit, which explores global aquatic habitats and the impacts of climate change. This exhibit aims to help visitors draw connections between local ecosystems and broader environmental concepts.

Additionally, construction of the Lava to Lakes exhibit, supported by the Arts, Culture, and Heritage Fund, began in fall 2024. This exhibit will showcase significant geological events that have shaped the Great Lakes region and Minnesota's landscape, as well as the flora and fauna that have adapted to these changes. More information on these projects can be found in Appendix B.

Our educational programming remained strong in 2024, with over 14,500 students actively participating in Aquarium-led experiences. Further details on these programs and initiatives are included in Appendix C.

Membership growth exceeded expectations, with a 12% increase over projections. Many of these memberships are family-based, reinforcing the Aquarium's role as a trusted and engaging learning space for families.

The future holds exciting opportunities as we expand our exhibits, develop new partnerships, and secure additional resources to enhance the Aquarium's impact on the region and the State of Minnesota.

For additional information, please feel free to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,



Elaine Hansen
Chair
Lake Superior Center Authority



Jay Walker
Executive Director
Great Lakes Aquarium



Appendix A – 2024 Financial Statements

Income Statement

	<u>Jan - Dec 24</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense	
Income	
4000 · Admissions	2,382,629.47
4050 · Membership Income	315,919.51
4400 · Education Income	176,883.35
4200 · Donations	537,250.74
4300 · Retail Sales	964,462.19
4250 · Facility Rental \ Special Event	161,209.67
4600 · Parking Income	235,947.45
4500 · Miscellaneous	<u>48,113.15</u>
Total Income	4,822,415.53
Cost of Goods Sold	
6000 · Cost of Sales	461,512.62
6710 · Freight Charges, Product	<u>30,620.92</u>
Total COGS	<u>492,133.54</u>
Gross Profit	4,330,281.99
Expense	
51100 · Freight and Shipping Costs	90.00
5100 · Admin. - Expenses	159,680.35
5101 · Admin Payroll	351,165.36
5200 · Education - Expenses	26,843.49
5201 · Education - Payroll	557,871.61
5300 · Husbandry - Expenses	204,903.24
5301 · Husbandry - Payroll	739,590.40
5400 · Operations -Facility- Expenses	694,869.96
5401 · Operations -Facility-Payroll	419,511.46
5700 · Operations-General Expense	241,154.67
5701 · Operations-Guest ServicePayroll	396,309.42
5500 · Facility Rental / Special Event	21,495.83
5600 · Store - Expenses	14,934.88
5601 · Store - Payroll	<u>50,439.05</u>
Total Expense	<u>3,878,859.72</u>
Net Ordinary Income	451,422.27
Other Income/Expense	
Other Income	
7305 · Minnesota Power Rebate Income	3,163.81
7000 · Purchase Discounts	2,428.68
7100 · Tourism Tax Operational Support	<u>350,000.00</u>
Total Other Income	355,592.49
Other Expense	
9043 · Sturgeon Conservation Project	2,840.00
9045 · Oceans Alive	215,455.52
9041 · Second Floor Remodel (Origins)	<u>533,341.00</u>
Total Other Expense	<u>751,636.52</u>
Net Other Income	<u>-396,044.03</u>
Net Income	<u><u>55,378.24</u></u>

Appendix A – 2024 Financial Statements

Balance Sheet

	<u>Dec 31, 24</u>
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
1000 · Cash and Cash Equivalents	<u>539,400.25</u>
Total Checking/Savings	539,400.25
Accounts Receivable	
1150 · Accounts Receivable	<u>112,574.19</u>
Total Accounts Receivable	112,574.19
Other Current Assets	
1300 · Other Current Assets	175,764.41
1380 · Undeposited Funds	<u>17,818.88</u>
Total Other Current Assets	<u>193,583.29</u>
Total Current Assets	845,557.73
Fixed Assets	
1200 · Fixed Assets	3,625,449.50
1250 · Accumulated Depreciation	<u>-2,436,200.48</u>
Total Fixed Assets	<u>1,189,249.02</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>2,034,806.75</u>
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	
2007 · Accounts Payable, General	<u>107,729.78</u>
Total Accounts Payable	107,729.78
Credit Cards	
2700 · Employee Credit Cards	<u>24,435.89</u>
Total Credit Cards	24,435.89
Other Current Liabilities	
2530 · Capital Lease Payable-Current	3,065.93
2500 · Other Current Liabilities	231,388.56
2900 · Deferred Revenue	<u>163,992.21</u>
Total Other Current Liabilities	<u>398,446.70</u>
Total Current Liabilities	530,612.37
Long Term Liabilities	
2300 · Long Term Liabilities	489,740.73
2301 · Capital Lease Payable	<u>8,366.44</u>
Total Long Term Liabilities	<u>498,107.17</u>
Total Liabilities	1,028,719.54
Equity	
3001 · Fund Balance	-635,517.45
3200 · Unrestricted Net Assets	1,586,226.42
Net Income	<u>55,378.24</u>
Total Equity	<u>1,006,087.21</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u>2,034,806.75</u>

Appendix B—2024 Accomplishments

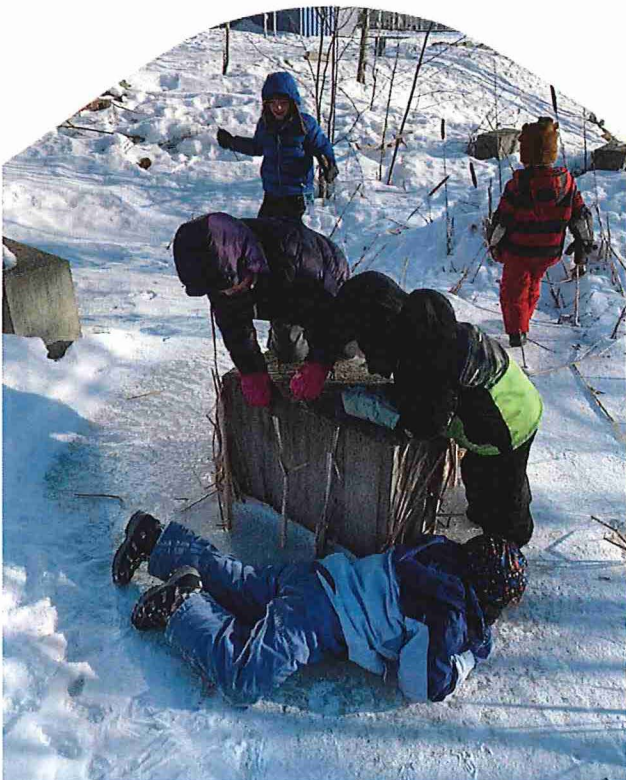
The following list show cases some of the efforts and success at the Great Lakes Aquarium this past year.

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 whom a visit to the Aquarium is not feasible.

2024 Accomplishments:

- ◇ 14,500 pre-k—12th grade students participated in onsite programming.
- ◇ 3,793 volunteer hours were served.
- ◇ 12,200 animal encounters
- ◇ 150 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 *Oceans Alive* exhibit gallery.
- ◇ Developed exhibit plan and secured funding for 2025 *Lava to Lakes* gallery renovation.
- ◇ Enhanced the playscape outdoor classroom to include many new teaching elements and a new fence.

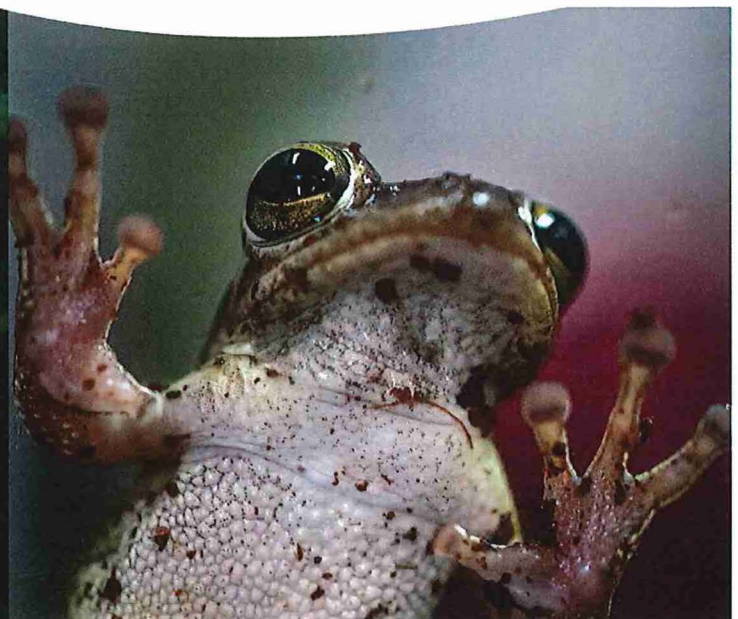


2) Exhibits/Husbandry/Facilities

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

Accomplishments 2024

- ◇ Opened the *Oceans Alive* gallery in June, featuring a variety of unique animals, including seadragons, frogfish, and a giant Pacific octopus.
- ◇ Began construction on "Lava to Lakes" gallery.
- ◇ Ordered equipment and aquariums for the "Lava to Lakes" gallery.
- ◇ Animal acquisitions included a Virginia opossum, brook trout, American eel, red squirrel and chipmunk.
- ◇ Duluth Energy upgraded our cooperative heating system from steam to a hot water system improving heating efficiency.
- ◇ Replaced degas tower above Isle Royale. This critical filtration component helps add oxygen and biologically remove nitrogen.
- ◇ Updated USDA guidelines for animal safety during emergencies.



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.

2024 Accomplishments:

- ◇ Throughout 2024, Great Lakes Aquarium's social media presence saw significant growth, particularly on Instagram, where strategic content and viral reels contributed to a notable increase in followers. Below is a snapshot of our social media growth over the year: **Facebook:** Increased from 18,473 to 18,779 likes **Instagram:** Grew from 13,742 to 19,388 followers (+41%) **TikTok:** Maintained steady engagement with 14.1K followers
- ◇ Created the Duluth Passport program a collaboration with the North Shore Scenic Railroad and the William A. Irving. The Duluth passport allows guests to purchase one ticket to visit all three attractions.
- ◇ Great Lakes Aquarium continued to receive strong media coverage across local and regional outlets with the opening of "Oceans Alive" and the creation of the Duluth Passport.
- ◇ Created a video commercial for the "Oceans Alive" exhibit, which ran on various television and online platforms.
- ◇ Began work on campaign for the upcoming "Lava to Lakes" exhibit opening in 2025
- ◇ 2025 will be Great Lakes Aquarium 25th Anniversary. The communications team started to develop marketing pieces to celebrate this special occasion.



(4) Community Engagement

At the Aquarium, we are committed to fostering strong community engagement by creating meaningful opportunities for visitors, employees, volunteers, and other stakeholders to connect with our mission. By building partnerships with local organizations, schools, and businesses, we strive to create enriching experiences that bring all people together and deepen their understanding of the Great Lakes region. Our current strategic plan includes dedicated efforts to strengthen community involvement through events, outreach programs, and volunteer opportunities. These initiatives help us build lasting relationships, remove barriers and ensure that the Aquarium remains a valued resource for the region.

2024 Accomplishments

- ◇ Our Community engagement team participated in 15 outreach programs with various organization including: Hamline's Center for Global Environmental Education, YMCA, AMPACT, Duluth Superior Pride, Duluth Superior Community Foundation and many others.
- ◇ Great Lakes Aquarium hosted 14 on-site outreach events with various science and non-profit organizations including Hawk Ridge, Celebrate Night Sky week, Epilepsy Foundation, Café Scientifique, One roof Community Housing and many others.



(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.

2024 accomplishments

- ◇ Events hosted 10,200 guests for weddings, corporate meetings, holiday parties, birthday celebrations, and other get-togethers.
- ◇ Membership purchases grew by 208 memberships (8.0%) and visits increased by 5% from 2023 to 2024. Member visits accounted for 19.7% of our attendance in 2024.
- ◇ Great Lakes Aquarium donated 2,884 tickets to 724 non-profit organizations.
- ◇ Great Lakes Aquarium gift store revenue surpassed our budget by 10.9% and increased by 14.2% from 2023-2024
- ◇ Guest service managers improved staff retention and engagement, enhancing customer service and reducing theft and errors.
- ◇ Our gift store manager strategically adjusted buying practices to increase margins, generating an additional \$14,500 in profit through improved margin percentages.

