



Pier 3 / 501 East Pratt Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202-3194
www.aqua.org

Contact: Hillary Walker
Phone: 410-576-3860
hwalker@aqua.org

THE NATIONAL AQUARIUM OPENS ITS DOORS WIDER New Wireless Tour Will Provide Access for Visually Impaired Visitors

Baltimore (May 12, 2004) – This week the National Aquarium in Baltimore rolls out an innovative new service for visitors who are blind or visually impaired. An audio wireless tour, currently available, allows visitors who are blind vastly improved access to the Aquarium’s exhibits. The wireless tour is part of a continuing initiative, along with programs such as Fridays After Five, to make the Aquarium and its many resources available to all in the community.

“We are excited about this technology, because it communicates the breathing, moving, colorful world of the Aquarium’s exhibits to an audience that has previously had very little access,” says Bililynn Savage, the Aquarium’s Special Customer Liaison. The challenge of translating the shapes and movements of exhibits in a meaningful way to the visually impaired was tackled by Joel Snyder of Audio Description Associates, the narrator of the new tour, who has extensive experience in creating such experiences. Using mobility and orientation cues, and descriptions that incorporate other sensory information like smells, sounds, and feels, the narration brings the natural world alive to the visitor.

The unobtrusive audio device consists of a receiver, no larger than a cell phone, and an earpiece. Once wearing the device, a guest can travel in any order between twenty-two audio stations positioned throughout the main Aquarium building and the Marine Mammal Pavilion. The tour will be updated as exhibits evolve. Initially, twenty units are available. Visitors do not need an appointment to enjoy the audio tour, they should simply ask for it at the Security Desk at the Accessible Entrance.

The project was funded by a grant from the Huston Foundation. The foundation, based in Conshohocken, Pa., supports projects promoting personal achievement and self-sustainment, and educational opportunities to individuals with special needs.

Since 1981, the National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization and world-class aquatic institute, has hosted more than 1.6 million visitors per year. Dedicated to education and conservation, it serves the environment, students, visitors and communities through a variety of educational and experiential programs. For more information, call 410-576-3845 or visit www.aqua.org.

###