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Message From The Executive Director

I often think about our founder Laura Hecox’s sentiment that she was taking everyone else into partnership with her in the enjoyment of her collection. I am so grateful for the people who have helped the Museum celebrate 120 years of connecting people with nature through the shared enjoyment of our exhibits, programs, and natural spaces.

This truth shines through every chapter of our history, from the collectors whose gifts founded the Museum, to the advocates who rallied to keep our doors open when city funding was cut, to the volunteers who lovingly built our first whale exhibit, and now, to the community that has united to restore and expand our beloved whale pod. As we look ahead to our transition into a new building, we envision not just walls and exhibits, but a vibrant home where future generations will gather to learn, connect, and be inspired by the natural world, carrying forward this enduring legacy of generosity and unity.

Felicia B. Van Stolk
Executive Director





Connecting People to Nature and Science

Through immersive exhibits, education for learners of all ages, and county wide outreach, we welcome our community to learn with us and become inspired.



35,253 joined
Attendees us at 266
Programs

“The instructor made an intimidating topic easy to understand and took us through every stage. They were vigilant, kind, helpful, and encouraging.”

- Workshop Attendee



K-12 Programs

We delivered 233 free school programs to more than 5,000 students; supported teachers through training and free lesson plans; and provided over \$20,000 in scholarships to increase access and equity across our offerings.



Outreach & Partnerships

Our Mobile Museums and bilingual programs have expanded our reach while strengthening connections in South County. These efforts have fostered lasting partnerships that enrich the Museum experience for both new and longtime patrons.

Special Exhibits & Events



Museum of the Macabre: Out of This World

Every October, this unique exhibit and accompanying party explore the parts of nature that both fascinate and frighten us. In 2024, we turned our gaze to the cosmos, exploring humanity’s enduring curiosity about space, and fears that come with confronting the vast unknown.



Treasured Trees: The Story of Coast Redwoods

The towering coast redwoods sparked some of California’s earliest conservation efforts and continue to inspire awe in all who encounter them. Through storytelling and scientific illustration, this exhibit celebrates the local history, ecology, and impact of these ancient giants.



The Museum’s Collections

Grounded in the Past, Pointed Towards the Future

This year, major strides were made in collections care and access, with volunteers and staff digitizing and transcribing 3,089 records, including paleontology and cultural collections that support research, management, and indigenous reparations efforts.

Over 1,000 specimens and artifacts were newly inventoried or cataloged, from locally collected shells that reveal mollusk trends in Monterey Bay to the first full cataloging of the Loma Prieta Earthquake collection since 1989. The collections also grew to include remarkable brittle star fossils from Santa Cruz’s ancient oceans and a Fresnel lighthouse lens fragment from the region’s more recent past.

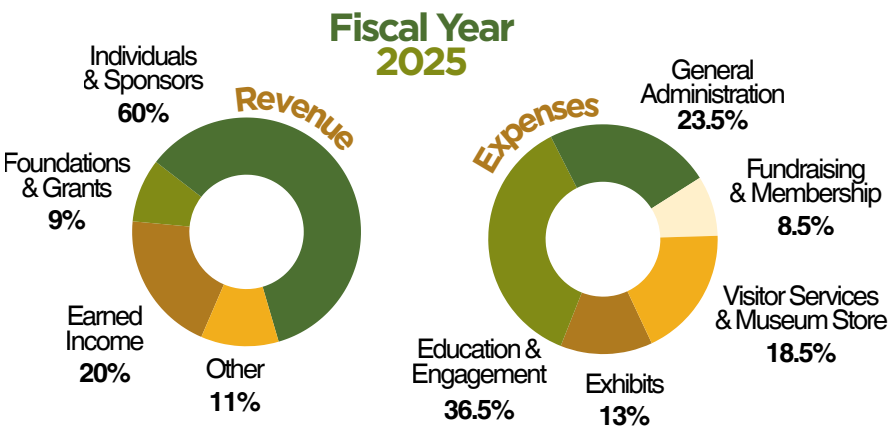


We are employing new environmental systems to preserve historic collections, and we are embracing contemporary strategies to preserve ancient fossils.



Financial Health

The Museum’s fiscal sustainability is supported by diverse funding streams, with revenue from individual donors, the Museum Store, ticketed events, and additional funding from foundations, government grants, and more.



The Bright Future Campaign

Raising funds to renovate, modernize, & expand Santa Cruz’s oldest museum

The project gained significant momentum last year, securing 80% of our \$20 million goal through generous leadership commitments. In June, we proudly unveiled the campaign’s first public-facing capital improvement: the restoration and enhancement of the iconic Gray Whale sculpture in Tyrrell Park, and in recognition of the Museum’s investment in the Bright Future Campaign, the City of Santa Cruz unanimously waived all permit and building fees.

The Museum is a community anchor—a place where people come together to share in the wonder of our natural environment. The Bright Future Project is a well-thought-out way to ensure the long-term success of that mission—that’s why we were inspired to make an early gift to the Project. “

- Julia & Steve Davenport, Bright Future Donors

Education & Outreach

At the Museum, we strive to help our community better understand and appreciate the world around us

In partnership with schools and families, we provide youth with opportunities to engage with science and nature through field trips and day camps. These experiences aim to spark curiosity and gently encourage the next generation of environmental stewards.



Statue Renovation

First installed in 1982 with a wave of community support, the iconic gray whale sculpture has long been a beloved landmark. This year, it was lovingly restored and joined by a new baby companion, a beautiful reminder of the care and dedication that make our community so special.



Community Meetings

Community meetings and City Commission hearings are underway following our permit application submission. Visit the Bright Future website (see below) for hearing dates, ways to give, and more!

Join Us!

We need your help to realize our strategic vision. Together, we will **Adapt**, **Evolve**, and **Advance** toward our Bright Future!



Get in touch & learn more:
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santacruzmuseum.org/brightfuture