IMMERSE LAUNCHES ON WORLD OCEANS DAY

Sausalito, CA (June 2019) — IMMERSE, a virtual reality (VR) 3D 360° film developed by the Hydrous to generate awareness and scientific understanding of coral reefs, will launch on the Oculus Store for the Oculus Go headset, and through Viveport Video on World Oceans Day, this Saturday June 8th. The film is available free of charge on these platforms, and through Hydrous classroom programs, film festivals, and events, including the current exhibit “Exotic Aquatic” at the Marin Art and Garden Center.

World Oceans Day was first recognized by the United Nations in 2009 to recognize the major role the oceans have in everyday life. The 2019 theme for World Oceans Day is Gender and the Oceans, addressing U.N. Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality) and 14 (Life Below Water). This week, the Marin County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution to recognize June 8th as World Oceans Day and honored three women of Marin County, including Hydrous CEO Dr. Erika Woolsey, for their contributions in ocean science and education.

The Hydrous goal for IMMERSE is to take one million people on a virtual dive, to connect viewers to beautiful and threatened coral reef ecosystems. During the dive, viewers follow Woolsey, a marine biologist. Additional scientists narrate the journey, including Dr. Pim Bongaerts and Dr. Terry Gosliner from the California Academy of Sciences and the late Dr. Ruth Gates, to whom the film is dedicated.

IMMERSE was co-developed by Horizon Productions (based in Durham, NC) and made its premiere at the International Ocean Film Festival at Fort Mason, in San Francisco. It was also shown at the Oxford
International Film Festival in England and EarthXFilm in Dallas, TX. It was also the recipient an Epic Games Development Grant and three 2019 Telly Awards in the Documentary, Not for Profit, and Use of 360 categories.

The Hydrous and Horizon Productions have been working on the film since early 2018 when the Hydrous team, including Dr. Woolsey, Rick Miskiv (Underwater VR cameraman and a Producer of IMMERSE), and Jason McGuigan (Horizon’s Chief Creative Officer), journeyed to Palau in the western Pacific. Here, Miskiv used the VRTUL2 camera to capture 360/3D underwater footage, including that of manta rays, sharks, corals, sea turtles, and famous Palauan dive sites. “We timed our expedition based on our experience and knowledge of the moon phases and marine life behavior,” says Miskiv. “The reward was diving with large groups of mantas, spawning aggregations of red snappers and Moorish idols and many grey reef sharks arriving for mating season. Having lived in Palau, there was a special joy in capturing the magic of this place and to be able to share it with others.” Additional footage was collected at the Philippine Coral Reef Exhibit at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco.

Horizon Productions led post-production of IMMERSE. Support for its development came from Lenovo, the Baum Foundation, Epic Games, Oxford University, and donations from individuals and private foundations.

The Hydrous believes that VR can be a powerful tool to connect people to threatened marine ecosystems. "Technology like virtual reality allows people to visit places they’ve never been and may never go," said Woolsey. "Few people get to travel beneath the waves, and many perceive the ocean as scary or even empty, so how can we protect what we don’t see or think about?"

During this process McGuigan was further educated on the urgency of the crisis in our oceans. “We need to take on unprecedented changes across all of society to protect ocean environments. Working on this project with Erika and the Hydrous gave Horizon the opportunity to work on an important project that helps further that cause.” McGuigan and Horizon overcame numerous challenges in underwater VR production. “The process of taking the footage we captured and then creating usable 3D 360° content that looks amazing inside of a VR headset is extraordinarily difficult.” said McGuigan.

The Hydrous and Horizon Productions teamed up again on Manta Ray Eden, a sold-out, live event at the National Geographic Museum in Washington, DC. While on stage in the Grosvenor Auditorium, Woolsey live-narrated VR footage of coral reefs, manta rays, and the lands of Palau, while 450 attendees in VR headsets simultaneously joined a virtual dive with her. In addition to the main evening production, two student matinees were held to allow local schoolchildren the opportunity to explore these ocean environments.

**About The Hydrous**
The Hydrous is a 501(c)3 non-profit, an international community of scientists, divers, designers, filmmakers, technologists, educators, and concerned citizens who love the ocean and want to share it to protect it. Since 2014, the Hydrous has been dedicated to analyzing and developing applications of emerging technologies for teaching, learning, research, and creative inquiry to inspire others to ‘See Blue, Save Blue.’ To learn more and support the Hydrous mission, visit: [www.thehydro.us](http://www.thehydro.us)
Producer Rick Miskiv filming 360° stereoscopic footage of Palauan reefs with the VRTUL2 camera. Foreground: Moorish idols aggregate over healthy coral. Photograph by Bob Concannon.

IMMERSE is a journey of Science, Love, and Magic in the ocean. Photograph by Pete Niesen.