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Pacific Marine Mammal Center Celebrates its 50th Year Anniversary

Beginning in 1971 as Friends of the Sea Lions, PMMC looks back on the history of the organization.

LAGUNA BEACH, CA Thursday, February 11, 2021 - Pacific Marine Mammal Center (PMMC), formerly Friends of the Sea Lions (FSL), is celebrating its 50th Year Golden Anniversary in 2021. From a small three person rescue team, rehabilitating seals in a bathtub, PMMC has grown into a leader in marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation and top-level scientific hub and education center.

FSL was the first licensed marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation center in the state of California. It began with two life guards, a veterinarian and a concerned little girl for a sick harbor seal on the beach.

"In 1971, Jim Stauffer, Dr. Rose Ekeberg, and I started a small group known as the Friends of the Sea Lions," said John Cunningham, co-founder for FSL. "With the help of a handful of Laguna Beach high school students, our mission was to rescue, rehabilitate and release sick and injured seals and sea lions along the Orange County coast. Today, 50 years later, I am so PROUD to still be a part of what's become a world-class non-profit now known as the Pacific Marine Mammal Center."

"I'm so proud to continue to see the community get behind this important mission," said co-founder Jim Stauffer. "It's been great to watch it grow all for the benefit of these precious marine mammals."

To date, PMMC has rescued over 10,000 marine mammals, all of which are Federally protected species that contribute significantly to our ocean eco-systems. Additionally, the organization educates tens of thousands of students annually, hosts up to 50,000 patrons annually at its visitor center in Laguna Beach, and is now diving head first into forefront research projects including ones involving cancer in sea lions and crucial killer whale research in hopes to save the dwindling Southern resident killer whale population.

“I am excited to join the Pacific Marine Mammal Center in celebrating their 50th Anniversary and all of the extraordinary contributions they have made to our region,” said U.S. Representative Mike Levin. “Now more than ever, it is critically important that we protect marine life and promote conservation, and I deeply appreciate the PMMC’s leadership on those values over their storied history. Like many families in our community, my kids have made lasting memories at the Center and we look forward to more visits in the future.”

The organization has been through many ups and downs. Surviving two catastrophic floods and mudslides, multiple fire evacuations and a three year-long sea lion UME or unusual mortality event, bringing PMMC to the very limit on resources. The PMMC community has always shown up and the organization would not be where it is today without that continued support.

“Pacific Life has been a proud supporter of the Pacific Marine Mammal Center for over 3 decades,” said Tennyson Oyler, President of Pacific Life Foundation. “We have seen firsthand the critical work that the Center has done for our local marine life, and we are delighted to see the organization continue to grow as an important contributor to conservation and science-based education and a champion for our environment.”

As part of the ongoing celebration of this historic milestone, PMMC will make this year’s annual Gala a very unique and memorable event highlighting the organization and community’s achievements over the years, will release limited edition products and apparel, and host other surprises. To start off, the organization has released a special homage to PMMC’s 50th anniversary with the creation of a commemorative 50th anniversary web page here.
“Throughout its history, it’s been a collaborative effort. That was made clear from Day 1 with the transformational work of John Cunningham, Jim Stauffer, and Dr. Rose Ekeberg, who were volunteers for years in making this the organization it is today,” said Peter Chang, CEO of Pacific Marine Mammal Center. “We continue to be a direct product of the remarkable passion and compassion from the community 50 years later, and that’s something we are extremely proud of. PMMC would like to thank every single volunteer, staff member, supporter, community member, donor, person who called an animal in, educator, collaborator, and everyone in between. Because of you, we are not only celebrating the past. We are looking forward to the future of Pacific Marine Mammal Center.”

Jim Stauffer releasing the very first patient in what would become PMMC.

A field trip to FSL in the original barn.

The sea lion UME.

Co-founders Jim Stauffer (left) and John Cunningham (right) visit PMMC in 2017.

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**About (Pacific Marine Mammal Center)**

The Pacific Marine Mammal Center rescues, rehabilitates and releases marine mammals and inspires ocean stewardship through research, education and collaboration. PMMC is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization. Our Tax-ID number is: 95-3680896

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