



necked turtles, iridescent rainbowfish, black-headed python, and other new-finned, scaled, or feathered Baltimore residents. Her favorite is the archer fish, which catches dinner by spitting a stream of water onto branches to knock off bugs. Says Bates, "I could watch it for 2 hours."

Aquarium Outreach Specialist Marjorie Bollinger likes the overall feeling of habitat immersion. You'll see Australian plants and wildlife everywhere, from high overhead to down below your feet. "Visitors won't just learn from ID labels and interactive screens," says Bollinger, "they'll get it from the exhibit." The education department also plans to enrich the learning possibilities through trained volunteers who will help visitors spot hidden critters, special programs such as overnights to allow nocturnal viewing, and school programs inviting kids to meet wallabies and cockatoos up close enough to touch.

The exhibit expansion will also help extend the aquarium's education mission outside. In the new Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Waterfront Park, a granite map of the six-state Chesapeake Bay watershed will alert visitors to their impacts on the

regional environment. "Most aquarium visitors are from the watershed," says Bollinger. Signs, docents, and, during special events, native wildlife, will help people see the connection. "The park shade will be a great place to wait before ticket time and learn about the Bay."

Renovations have also resulted in a new aquarium store, featuring hand-carved boomerangs and other Australian crafts and gifts, and the Old Bay Café, an eatery that teaches about marine conservation through a menu with responsible seafood choices. All of these changes, from the river gorge waterfall to the café's sustainably harvested fish soup, reflect the aquarium's mission to connect visitors and nature. "Many people who live in Maryland may never get a chance to travel someplace as far-flung as Australia," says Sutherland, but "Wild Extremes" is a way for them to feel closer to wild places. Sutherland insists, "The more people who form connections with nature around the world, the greater is our chance to preserve it for the future."

—Julie Dunlap

Visitor Information

National Aquarium in Baltimore
501 East Pratt Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
410-576-3800

www.aqua.org (check the Web site for upcoming special events)

Tickets: (available at the aquarium or on line—extra service fee if ordered on line)
\$19.50—adults; \$18.50—60 years or older;
\$13.50—3 to 11 years old; Free—under 3
Hours (November, December, January, February)

Fridays: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturdays–T
hursdays: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Christmas Eve: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Closed Christmas Day



FIRST NIGHT 2006

2006 First Night Annapolis

A Community Celebration

"Light Up Annapolis!" is the theme of this year's First Night Annapolis, the city's official New Year's Eve celebration, says Executive Director Robert Keil. A tradition for 15 years, the event will be adding a new twist this year. After First Act, a multifaceted performance for small children and their parents that will take place at Maryland Hall from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., there will be the brandnew Community Processional. "This is a 'People's Parade,'" Keil explains. "The brand identification of what First Night does and did has gotten very fuzzy," he says. "We need to get more community based and more identified." The processional will feature members of



the community, like Boy Scout troops, civic organizations, and student groups. It will leave Maryland Hall at 5:30 p.m. and end at Church Circle, officially starting the downtown celebrations.

In 2004, Keil became executive director of First Night Annapolis, Inc. With a long career as a freelance event coordinator in the corporate sector, including working as program director for the 1996 Atlanta Centennial Olympic Games, he is well equipped for the task. This year is his first opportunity to spearhead the First Night Celebration from start to finish.

One of the first steps toward including more members of the community is for the organization to continue its free button program started last year. Free First Night button vouchers will be distributed to 44,000 students in Annapolis public elementary schools. The program "has been very successful in reaching out to develop new audiences and to bring kids into the celebration," says Keil.



Many of the smaller children enjoy just the First Act component of the evening. But that's okay. Last year's First Act drew 4,000 attendees and this year's is expected to be just as popular.

After First Act, according to Keil, "Kids as well as adults will mix together as sort of a thematic collage celebrating the fact that this is New Year's Eve." This year's offerings will focus on diversity. "Our goal," he says, "is to create a program so eclectic that you really couldn't buy a ticket for it anywhere else." Event-

goers can enjoy Celtic music at one location and then experience African-themed performances just next door. The Latin Quarter, where attendees can receive professional salsa lessons with live music, was such a success last year that it will certainly be included this year.

Another community outreach effort is the student art contest. Students of Annapolis-area public schools are invited to submit works of art featuring this year's theme. A blue-ribbon jury will judge the entries and announce first-, second-, and third-place winners during December. Winners will receive cash rewards and have their works displayed at a special gallery during First Night.

This year First Night will also attempt to reduce foot traffic at the end of the evening. "We are extending our partnership with the city to try to help them with one of the problems they have at midnight," explains Keil. "After the fireworks there is a huge exodus and the streets are jammed." To solve this problem, the City Dock Tent, a First Night music venue, will roll up its sides after the fireworks display and have the band perform a final set. "It will be something for the people to do to help retain some of the flow that will go up the street," he says.

First Night will still keep its traditional structure and soul, with regional performers and exhibits for button-holders. The new ideas will only improve the experience. On the changes for this year, Keil says, "We're bringing Annapolis back into our name. We don't want Annapolis to be just a location; we want it to be an inspiration."

—Conal Darcy

If your group wishes to participate in the Community Processional or you wish to attend or volunteer at First Night, call the general information line at (410) 268-8553 or visit www.firstnightannapolis.org for more information.

Parking will be available at the Navy-Marine Corps Stadium. There will be free shuttles to and from Maryland Hall during First Act and downtown thereafter until 1:30 a.m. Parking fees will be posted on the Web site.