



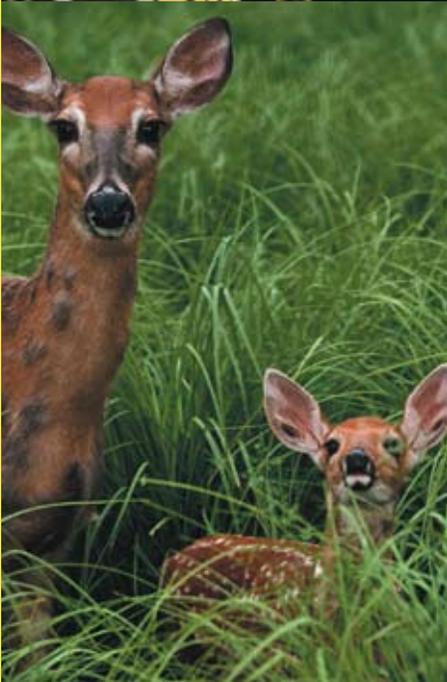
STRATEGIC PLAN



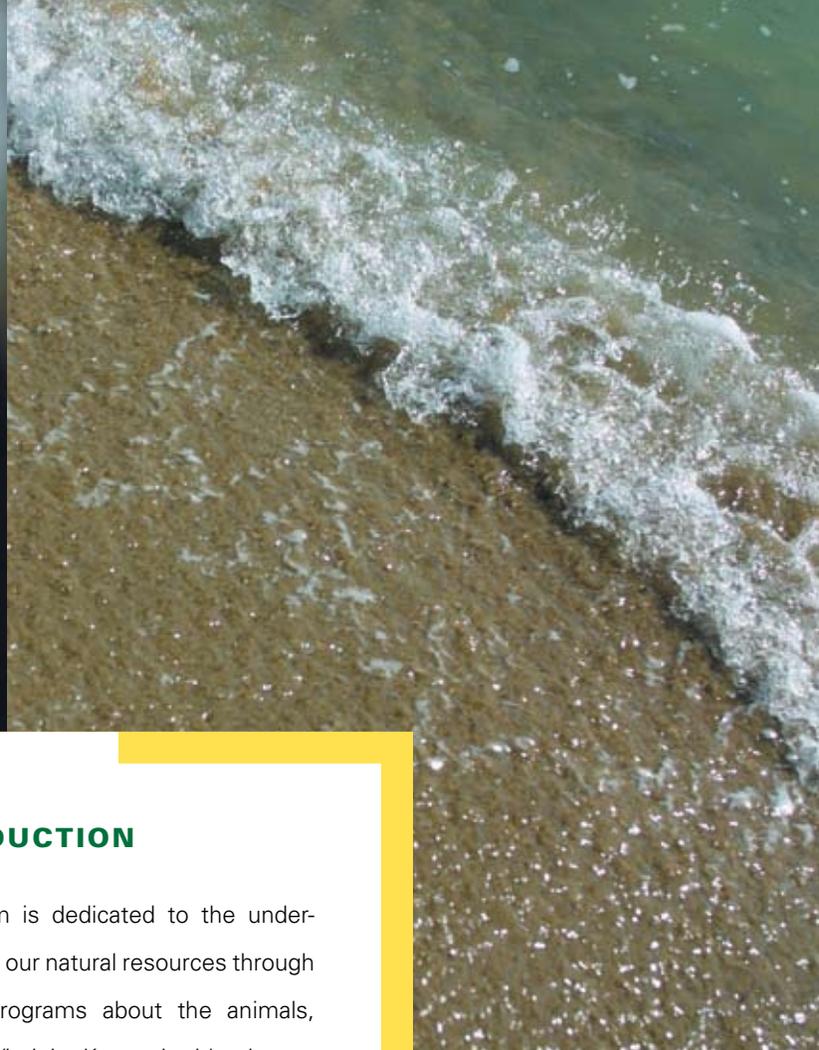
VIRGINIA  
LIVING  
MUSEUM



STRATEGIC PLAN

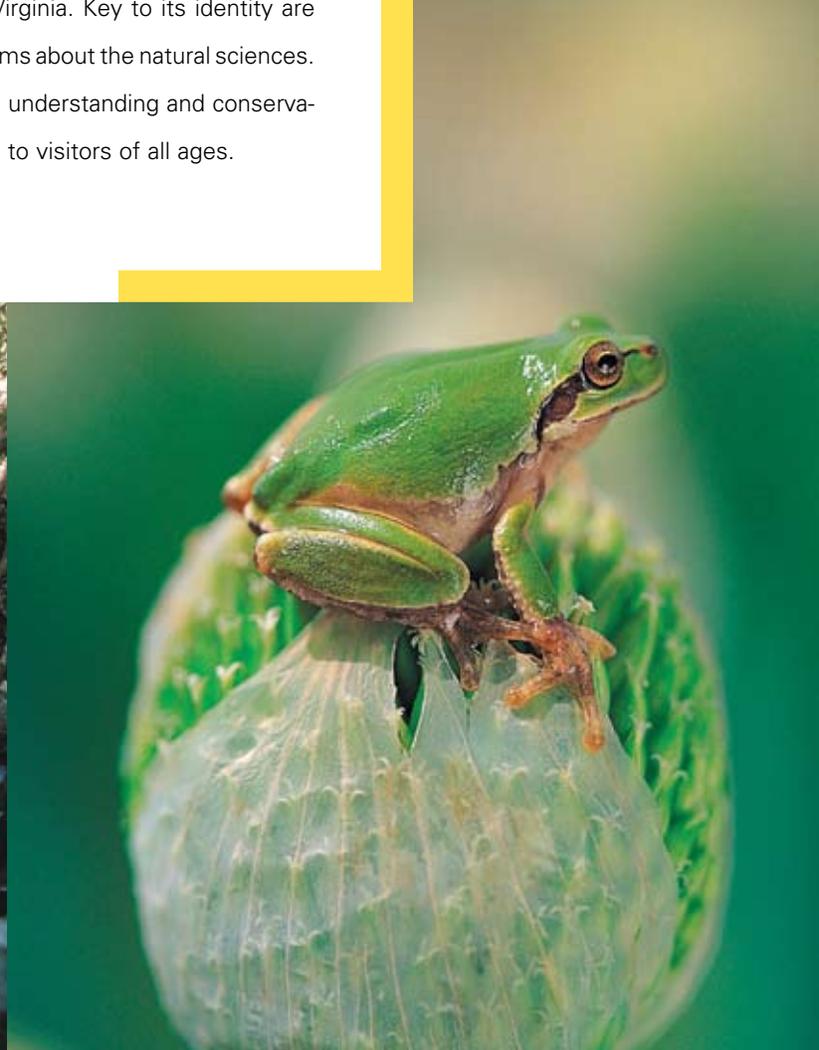
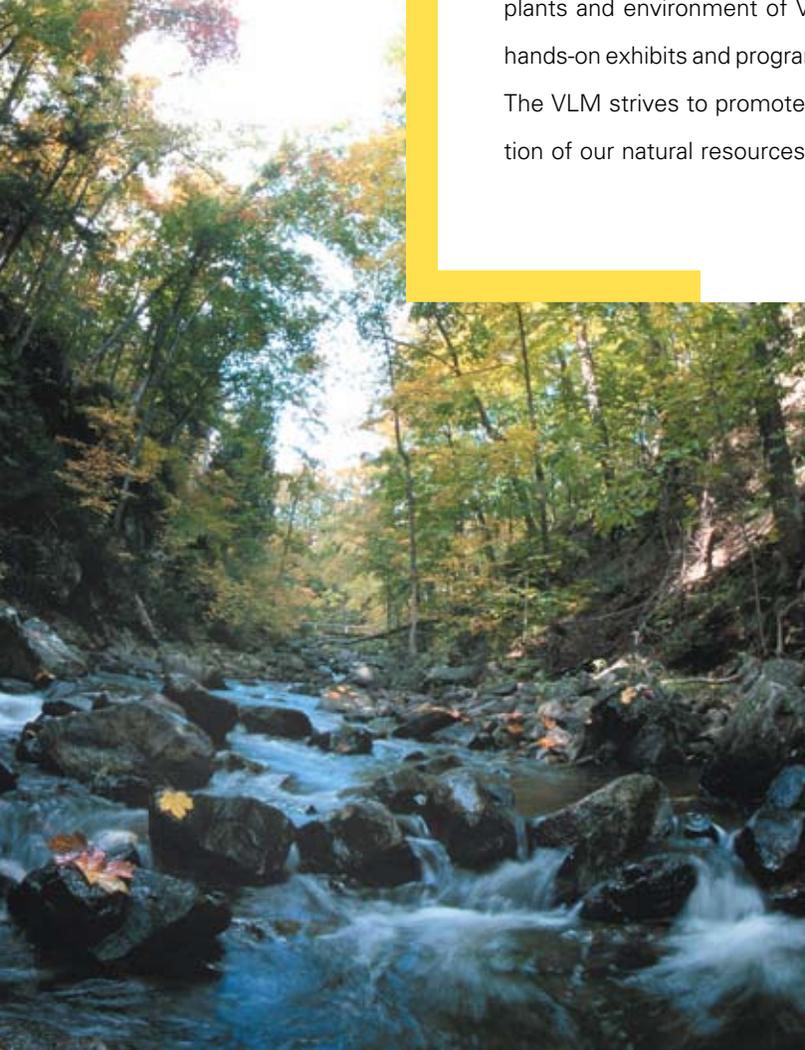


APPROVED 5/15/06



## INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Living Museum is dedicated to the understanding and conservation of our natural resources through educational exhibits and programs about the animals, plants and environment of Virginia. Key to its identity are hands-on exhibits and programs about the natural sciences. The VLM strives to promote understanding and conservation of our natural resources to visitors of all ages.



## Strengths

The Museum has many strengths beginning with its mission to provide meaningful interactions to connect people to nature. The highest priority programs are K-12 classes correlated to state and national standards of learning to assist students in achieving science objectives. The Museum serves a need to enhance and promote the sciences, a national objective to keep our workforce competitive. VLM's education programs are recognized by NSF as well as the U.S. and Virginia Departments of Education.

The Museum's strengths also include its outstanding and committed staff and volunteers. Staff has decades of experience and a real love for both their work and the mission of the institution. Volunteers do the work of 17 fulltime staff and are an integral part of the hands on, personal experience that is the core of the institution. The Museum also enjoys strong support from a large member base and from community leaders who value the institution's mission. Growth in community support has been evidenced by an increase from 2002-2005 in membership (94%) and in revenues (more than doubled).

The Museum's new facility completed in March 2004 is also an institutional strength. It is designed to showcase the natural resources of Virginia through indoor and outdoor exhibits and provide education spaces to enable many different kinds of interactions from one-on-one to classes, labs, small group demonstrations and larger audience presentations and lectures. In addition, the Museum operates the only public observatory in southeastern Virginia and the only public planetarium on the Peninsula.

The Museum maintains one of the largest and diversified collections of program animals in the country. We successfully display a variety of indigenous wildlife in their natural habitats.

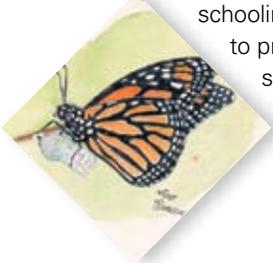
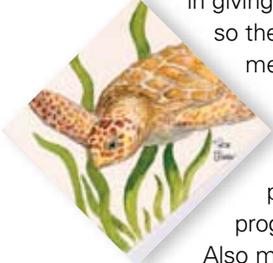
## Challenges

The Museum's two greatest challenges are financial. The Museum must fund \$6 million of the remaining construction expense of the new facility. The Museum has secured funding for payments until 2013. The Museum will not be able to operate if funding is not secured. Equally important is the challenge of the annual operating budget. The budget was subsidized by state operational funding for many years. When state funding was eliminated, the Museum was successful for several years in securing annual earmarks from the federal budget.

In a major initiative in 2005 to achieve a balanced budget without state or federal funding, drastic reductions were made in staff and numbers of programs while also increasing program fees. The Museum is now charging the maximum fee rates that the market will bear. While the quality of programming is unsurpassed, high rates make the VLM vulnerable to competition from other museums and entities. The reductions in staffing have left the Museum understaffed by 25-30%.



## Opportunities



There are many trends that could create opportunities for the Museum. Nationally, there is a large transfer of wealth that creates opportunities for planned giving. Baby Boomer donors are more entrepreneurial in giving and want to create something new; so the Museum can incorporate this messaging into its fundraising projects.

There are more and more households with two-parents working; the Museum has an opportunity to provide longer camps and after school programs to accommodate their children. Also more and more parents are home-schooling; the Museum has an opportunity to provide programming for home-schooling groups. In schools science is increasingly concentrated on SOL's and national tests; the Museum can provide correlated labs and

classes to support this need. Our nation is not producing enough graduates in science and math to remain globally competitive; the Museum can help meet this need and make science fun!

Zoos and aquaria are increasing their leadership role in conservation/field research and expanding their opportunities for partnership and funding with research institutions; the Museum can encourage research, scholarship and partnership with local colleges while also sharing current research with the VLM audience.

Regionally, tourism is increasing and the Museum has an opportunity to capture that new audience. Also, more and more wealthy retirees are moving to the region and could provide new resources and possibly volunteer resources. The state is increasing awareness and funding related to the environment, so the Museum may be able to help the state achieve new environmental education goals and receive additional state funding.

## SUMMARY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In five years the Virginia Living Museum will:

- Attract 1 million additional visitors and increase our adult audience, enhancing regional economic development and improving the quality of life in our community.
- Reach an additional 500,000 children with meaningful educational programming about our natural resources in order to promote achievement in science and create an awareness of the need for environmental stewardship by future generations.
- Invest a minimum of \$3 million to develop innovative and inspirational exhibits and facilities to better connect people to nature so that they will understand and protect the balance of our natural world.
- Fund \$6 million remaining construction expense, establish sustainable funding formula with earned revenue representing 60% or less of total annual budget, and increase endowment by \$2 million to ensure the long-term financial health of the Museum.

## I INTERPRETATION

**VISION:** *To connect people to wildlife and natural resources and promote conservation through exhibits, communications and educational programs*

### PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS:

#### Exhibits

1. Increase animal interactions in the gallery by adding mobile handlers and demonstrations by both staff and additional volunteers.
2. Create a plan and timeline for adding and improving outdoor exhibits to optimize interactions with visitors with exhibits such as “baby” animals that attract visitors.
3. Establish continuing three-year plan for rotating exhibits in the changing exhibits gallery that increases visitation.
4. Achieve AZA accreditation for the Museum.
5. Incorporate more information about conservation into exhibits and communications.

#### Educational Programs

1. Expand programs and events for adults such as a speakers program or “brown bag” series and evening social events.
2. Identify new cooperative programming and projects with area high schools and colleges including possibility of classes for credit and research initiatives.
3. Research and recommend internet learning and promotional programming.
4. Increase outreach programs that attract, inspire and motivate people to help us with our mission.

#### Communications

1. Conduct market analysis to research regional population, tourism opportunities and membership needs.
2. Expand audience beyond Virginia with tour group marketing and collaborations with other sites such as Colonial Williamsburg.
3. Market programs to special interest groups such as garden clubs, hunting and fishing organizations and retirees.

#### Additional Action Items

- Offer longer camps to serve working parents.
- Assess and update all museum publications and materials to ensure that they have a unified voice and attract, inspire and motivate people to help us with our mission.
- Improve animal care by adding veterinary technician and providing continuing education for curatorial staff.
- Enhance visitor and volunteer experience by improving staff-driven customer service.



## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (continued)

### II FACILITIES

**VISION:** *To operate state-of-the-art facilities which provide outstanding environments for animals, inspirational and repeatable experiences for visitors.*

**PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS:**

1. Establish on-site food service to improve customer service and extend visitors stay and possibly attract visitation to the Museum.
2. Add new informational sign at entrance to increase visibility and program/gift shop/café advertising.
3. Update planetarium equipment (rather than build new facility).
4. Solve need for lecture and animal program space including a study for additions of amphitheater and auditorium.

**ADDITIONAL ACTION ITEMS:**

- Increase security oversight.
- Improve catering facilities and equipment to encourage facility rentals.
- Reduce energy consumption and promote green business practices.
- Develop ways to integrate the two Museum buildings such as enhancing the walkway with signage/exhibits.

### III HUMAN RESOURCES

**VISION:** *To align our workforce and volunteer support with our institutional vision.*

**PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS:**

1. Reduce the size of the Board of Trustees and activate an expanded executive committee to ensure engagement and support.
2. Create an Education Program Board to provide input on school needs and advocacy for VLM educational programs.

**ADDITIONAL ACTION ITEMS:**

- Assess staffing and volunteer levels to ensure they are adequate for operations and aligned with our mission and vision.
- Provide fair and adequate compensation, rewards and professional development for staff.
- Increase and retain highly trained and motivated volunteers, improving communication and volunteer support.
- Improve HR administration including training to improve procedure and developing staff orientation.
- Assess technology services and staffing.



Watercolor images courtesy of Tede Johnson

## IV FINANCIAL RESOURCES

**VISION:** *To ensure the long-term financial health of the Museum using best business practices and a climate of entrepreneurship.*

### PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS:

1. Fund remaining construction expenses of \$6 million (will be \$8.5 million in 2012).
2. Establish sustainable funding formula with earned revenue representing 60% or less of total annual budget (the balance coming from donations and grants from public and private sources).
3. Organize a new fund-raising campaign based on the strategic plan goals.
4. Broaden base of support through efforts such as creating regional Trustee groups to assist in fundraising and hosting cultivation events to attract new audiences.
5. Create a government relations committee of the Board of Trustees to marshal Board members to lobby for significant increase in local funding from Newport News and surrounding municipalities, as well as state and federal support.
6. Research option of VLM coming under the formal umbrella of the state or city.

### ADDITIONAL ACTION ITEMS:

- Develop sustainable plan for funding traveling exhibits.
- Create planned giving program.
- Identify grant opportunities that meet strategic goals, including major national grant opportunities.
- Increase gift shop income 20% per visitor average.



### Long Range Planning Committee

William Downey,  
*President Board of Trustees 2005-2006*

Jerome Clark,  
*President-elect 2005-2006*

Ellen Thacker,  
*Chair*

Courtney Gardner

Willard Hoskins

John Stegeman

Lynn Sugg

