

# DISCOVERY WORLD

A Michael J Cudahy Legacy

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

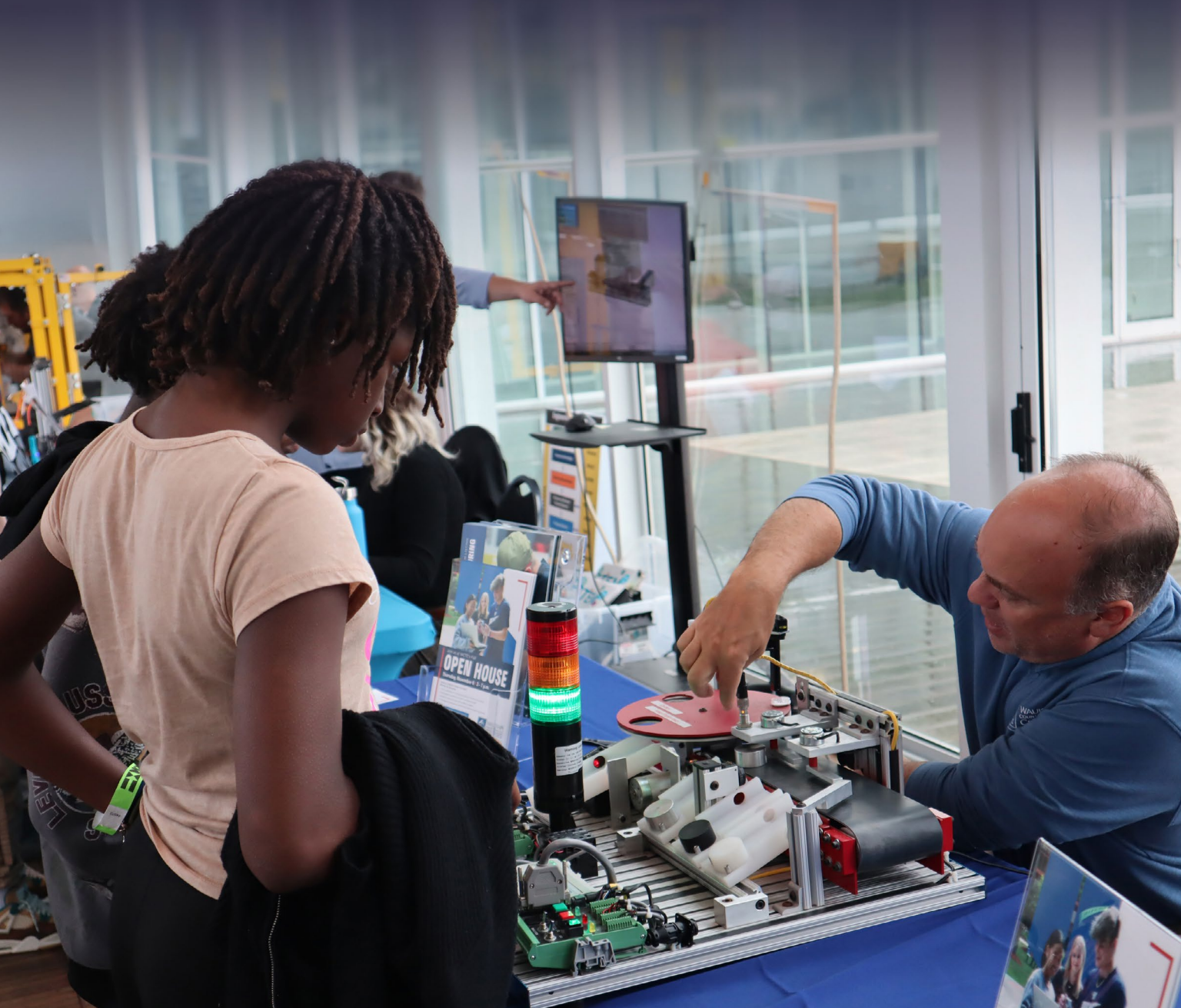
**We leverage the awesome powers of science and encourage you to embark on your own path to discovery**

## **OUR MISSION**

To inspire generations to discover the wonders of science.

## **OUR VISION**

A world where every child is empowered to be curious and explore endlessly.



# DEAR DISCOVERY WORLD COMMUNITY,

This past year was defined not only by what we accomplished, but by *how* we accomplished it: **together**.

Highlighting the strength of each other and our community is what Discovery World has always been about. Your willingness to show up, give generously, and believe in what's possible has remained a steady force driving our mission forward.

Because of your partnership, Discovery World expanded its reach and deepened its impact. Each success story this year is a direct reflection of your trust and engagement. Across **our on-site and outreach educational programs**, we served students, schools, and families with intention; responding quickly and thoughtfully to the evolving needs of hands-on science learning.

Here on **Milwaukee's lakefront**, we invested in facility improvements and **exhibit updates** to elevate our **guest experience** and ensure we are good stewards of our building. In our **Aquarium**, the Caribbean Tank received not only needed improvements, but a brand new 6-foot-wide viewing dome to deepen engagement through an immersive experience. These efforts were not about short-term gains. They are about building a stronger STEM learning foundation for the future.

We also embraced innovation through enhanced service models, data analytics, and improved operational systems. We challenged ourselves to work smarter and more collaboratively. These advances have helped us respond with greater agility and accountability, ensuring that every dollar entrusted to us is used effectively and responsibly.


None of this would be possible without the extraordinary people who bring our mission to life each day. I am deeply grateful to our **dedicated staff**, whose expertise and heart define our work; to our **volunteers**, who give their time and talents so generously; and to our **Board of Directors**, whose leadership and governance continue to guide us forward with clarity and purpose.

To our **donors and funding partners**: your generosity is not just financial. It is an investment in people, in potential, and in lasting change. Your belief in our mission enables us to take bold steps, sustain essential programs, and envision a Discovery World future for generations to come.

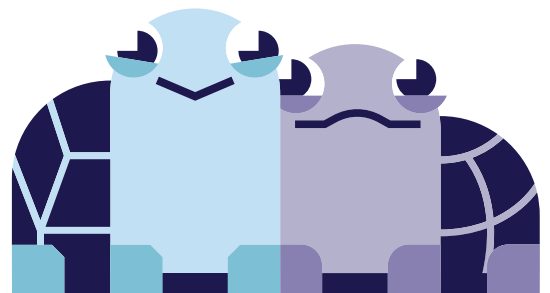
To our **guests**, thank you for choosing Discovery World as a place to explore and spark curiosity, build STEM understanding, and share meaningful experiences with your family.

Each one of us is an essential part of this work. Thank you for believing in Discovery World, and for helping us build a stronger science learning community for all.

With gratitude and excitement,



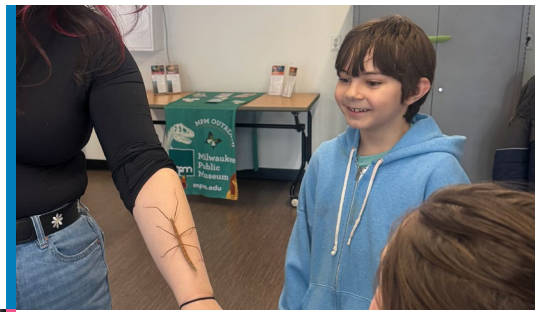
John Emmerich  
*President and CEO*



# YEAR AT A GLANCE

## JANUARY

**Gross Out Day:** The Science behind all things icky, sticky, gooey & wiggly.



## FEBRUARY

**Brookfield Academy & Xylem** took a deep dive into water science with a hands-on experience testing water samples, some from our own aquarium.



## MARCH

**Girls in STEM:** An incredible day on hands-on STEM fun with inspiring female role models and 20+ exhibitors in these fields!



*Congratulations  
Heather!*

**BizTimes**  
MILWAUKEE BUSINESS NEWS  
Notable Nonprofit Board Leader

## APRIL

We're so proud to celebrate this well-deserved honor and grateful for the dedication and leadership Board Director, **Heather Hipke**, brings to Discovery World. Her commitment to our mission makes a lasting impact every single day.



## MAY

**Curiosity & Conversation:** Discovery World President & CEO John Emmerich, alongside Board Co-Chair Lori Richards and partners at Gilbane, led a dynamic conversation exploring past milestones and future possibilities.



## JUNE

**Summer Camp** season kicked off with 11 weeks of full-day discovery welcoming 1,595 curious campers for hands-on adventures, creative exploration, and one unforgettable summer of science.

# YEAR AT A GLANCE

## JULY

We welcomed the U.S. Navy for a week of connection with our summer campers. Linking projects to real-world careers and life on the water.



## AUGUST

Wheels & Water rolled into Discovery World as a FREE outdoor celebration bringing together the people, vehicles, and vital systems that keep Milwaukee moving and thriving.

## SEPTEMBER

On behalf of Discovery World, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who joined us or supported this year's Explore Gala. Your generosity and enthusiasm help inspire future generations to explore the wonders of science.



## OCTOBER

Because of your incredible support, students from across the Greater Milwaukee area experienced an unforgettable day of exploration, hands-on learning, and inspiration! Tech & Trades Day connects students with real-world opportunities using interactive demos, hands-on workshops with professionals, and more.

## NOVEMBER

Discovery World hosted Maker Faire's FREE annual event celebrating engineers, artists, scientists, and crafty creators sharing their projects, passions, and playful discoveries.



## DECEMBER

Is it magic... or science? Magic Mirror made its debut. This interactive exhibit unpacks the science of optical illusions, from the brain's visual processing to the fascinating ways perception can be challenged and transformed.

# Visibility

Establish Discovery World as your place for fun science learning

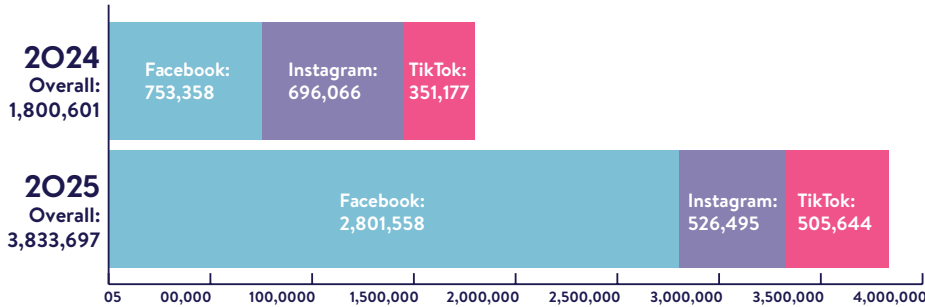
In 2025, Discovery World expanded its visibility through high-impact collaborations, media partnerships, and signature programs that reached broad audiences.

National recognition, including being named among **USA Today's Top Ten Science Museums**, elevated Discovery World's profile, while programs like **Weather Day** and **Children's Fest** drove strong engagement and awareness.

Together, these efforts strengthened Discovery World's reputation as a leading destination for fun, hands-on science learning and increased awareness across the region and beyond.

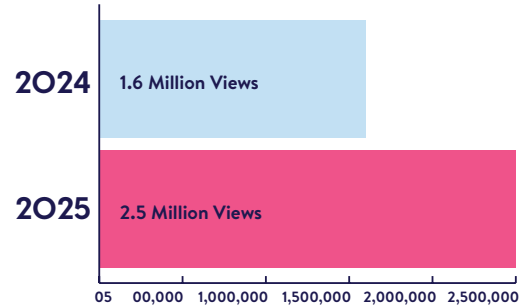


## Social Media Reach



We increased social media reach in 2025 by 113% compared to 2024

## Website Statistics



We increased new website users in 2025 by 60% compared to 2024



Discovery World was proud to receive a Joint Event Marketing (JEM) Grant from **Travel Wisconsin**, which supported expanded promotion of **Turtle Fest**. Through this partnership, we were able to reach new day-trip and overnight audiences across Wisconsin and strengthen awareness in the Chicagoland market.

This campaign helped introduce Discovery World to new guests, broaden our regional impact, and bring even more families to experience our mission in action.

# Educational Reach & Influence

Serve as a primary support system for science education in Wisconsin

## Outreach

Discovery World’s commitment to education extends far beyond our walls. Through our educational outreach programs, we bring hands-on science experiences directly into schools and community spaces, reaching students who may not otherwise have access to these opportunities.

In 2025, our Education Outreach team connected with **32,911 participants** through mobile STEM programs. These programs give students the chance to experience science in a hands-on way while transforming abstract classroom concepts into something they can see, touch, and experiment with.

**EVENTS: 120      SESSIONS: 199      INTERACTIONS: 32,911**



## Onsite

Over 13,000 square feet of classroom space across 10 rooms allowed **13,974 students** "Aha!" Moments with our educators in 2025. Our group visits and **BOOKED PROGRAMMING** experiences offer opportunities you won't find in the classroom. We offer Hands-on, STEM-based labs for 30-, 60-, or 90-minute sessions. This year we provided **685 sessions!**

For over a decade, Discovery World has offered **partner programming**, which has allowed us to expand our impact while allowing learners access to specialized STEM learning experiences, increasing access to communities historically underserved.

### Single visit from community partner schools

- MPS Learning Journeys and SHARP **44,056** students visits

### Grant Funded Admission:

**9,810**

### Multiple visits from corporate partner schools

- Johnson Controls **406** student visits
- Rockwell **472** student visits

### Grant Funded Onsite Programming:

**2,319**



## Summer Camp

**11** weeks of week-long camps

**102** camp sessions

**1,595** campers

**145** scholarships

**54** different topics, 4 grade bands offered for kiddos entering 1<sup>st</sup> grade through 9<sup>th</sup> grade

**Over 30** hours of instruction for each participant



## Guest Experience

*Elevate guest experience with relevant exhibits and engaging events*

From **Member Appreciation Night** to **Halloween Members Night**, Discovery World continues to create unforgettable moments just for members throughout the year. These events give families the chance to experience the museum in a different way, after hours and alongside other members, while building traditions that bring them back year after year. It is one of the many ways Discovery World becomes more than a museum. For our members, it is a place on Milwaukee's lakefront where kids grow up, families connect, and members truly feel at home.



**Mermaid Echo and Milwaukee Riverkeeper** collaborated for a special performance at Discovery World, creating a memorable experience that combined environmental education with a sense of fun and wonder. The partnership provided families the chance to engage with water conservation themes in a way that felt both magical and meaningful, highlighting Discovery World's unique ability to blend science learning with unforgettable experiences.



**The Reiman Aquarium** enhances Discovery World's public experience by creating meaningful, hands-on opportunities for learners of all ages. In 2025, the team supported 18 unique outreach and engagement experiences, extending their impact beyond the exhibit floor.



These efforts ranged from first grade field trips to high school job shadows, aquarium internships, and career fair connections that introduced students to STEAM pathways. Guests also engaged through exclusive behind-the-scenes tours and the dive program, offering unique perspectives on animal care and aquarium operations. Together, these experiences strengthen access, deepen engagement, and connect more people to science.

## Broaden Participation

Broaden participation to make science accessible to all



As Wisconsin's workforce continues to evolve, Discovery World's **Tech & Trades** event helps students see the many career paths available to them after graduation. By bringing together local employers, technical colleges, and industry partners, students get the chance to explore careers they may not have previously considered and hear firsthand how people got their start.

What makes the event memorable are the simple but important interactions like students trying hands-on activities, asking questions about what a typical workday looks like, and making connections with professionals from across our region. **Tech & Trades** reflects Discovery World's ongoing commitment to helping young people better understand their options and feel more confident about what comes next.

- **230** students attended
- **5** schools
- **11** partnering orgs sponsored our event and **4** additional volunteer groups

Discovery World partnered with Waukesha County Technical College's Automation Systems Technology program to host a **Robotics Showcase** featuring student capstone projects. The event gave graduating students the opportunity to present their work to industry professionals and the community, gaining real-world experience while building connections in the field.



Our biggest off-site outreach event of the year is: **WE Energies Park at the Wisconsin State Fair!** We engage children and families in fun, hands-on learning about pollination & solar energy, with an exciting scavenger hunt and Solar Power Pollinators project. Volunteers will receive a ticket to the fair and a parking pass for the day.

In 2025, we interacted with over **11,000** guests! This event is a great way to see our outreach team connects directly with the community we serve. It's a firsthand opportunity to better understand how Discovery World inspires curiosity and learning outside of our walls. It's meaningful, impactful, and fun!

## Early Science Learners

Expand our audience to include early learners



Discovery World welcomed new visitors through the **Curious George™: Let's Get Curious!** traveling exhibit, introducing early learners and their families to the museum through a character they already know and love. The nationally recognized brand created a natural entry point for younger audiences, helping Discovery World connect with families visiting for the first time.

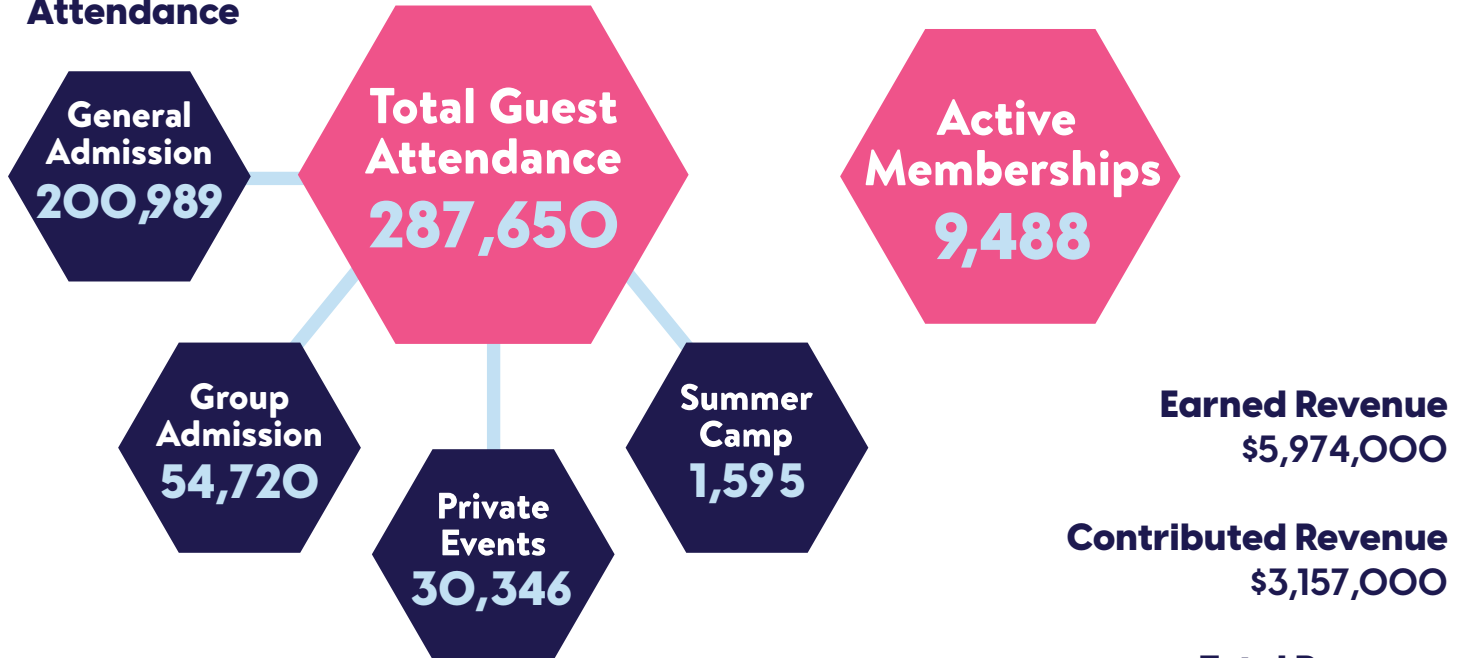
The exhibit gave children the chance to learn through play, with activities focused on curiosity, problem solving, and early STEM skills. At the same time, the partnership helped expand Discovery World's visibility among young families and reinforced our role as a place where even the youngest learners can begin their science journey. By pairing a trusted children's brand with Discovery World's hands-on learning approach, the exhibit helped create new connections with families at an important stage in their learning lives.



# 2025 IN NUMBERS

Discovery World has built a strong community presence without any current federal funding and is poised to scale with future support. Discovery World is proud to operate as a debt-free organization, ensuring financial stability and long-term sustainability.

## Attendance



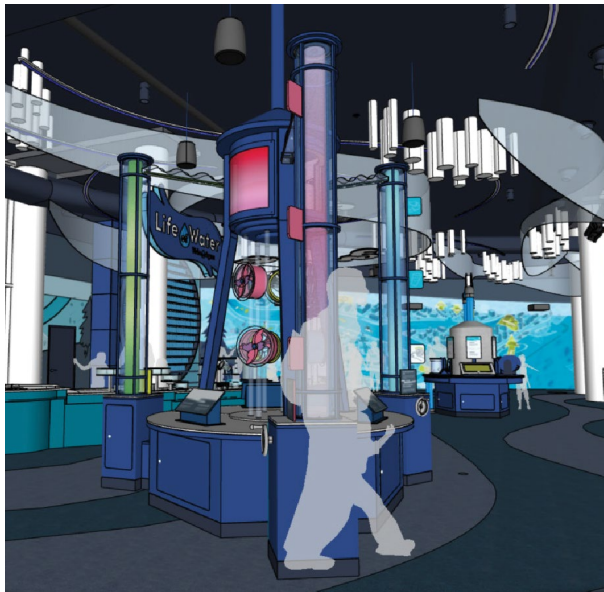
Thank you to everyone who helped us provide all of the "Aha!" moments through their generous in-kind donations.

*\*Excludes restricted gift of \$6.25M from The Cudahy Foundation. This included \$5M to establish an endowment, and \$1.25M to support capital infrastructure.*



Private events play a vital role in supporting Discovery World's mission to inspire generations to discover the wonders of science. From corporate gatherings to celebrations on the lakefront, these experiences generate meaningful revenue while bringing new audiences through our doors. Recognized as a finalist for Best Waterfront Venue by Wisconsin Bride and powered by our nearly 20-year partnership with Bartolotta Catering & Events, our event program continues to blend world-class experiences with lasting community impact.

# LOOKING AHEAD



## Life of Water

Water connects all of us. With the opening of Life of Water later this year, Discovery World will invite guests to see themselves as part of that story. The exhibit brings to life the movement, impact, and importance of water through immersive, hands-on experiences rooted in the Great Lakes. It is a powerful reminder that every person has a role to play in shaping the future of our water.

## Traveling Exhibits

Discovery World is sharpening its focus on traveling exhibits to drive summer attendance and keep the experience fresh. In 2025, Let's Get Curious George attracted new audiences and energized a key peak season. We see similar opportunity with **Mobilab in 2026**. Looking ahead, we plan to introduce a new traveling exhibit each summer to create urgency, encourage repeat visits, and ensure families find something new every time they walk through our doors.



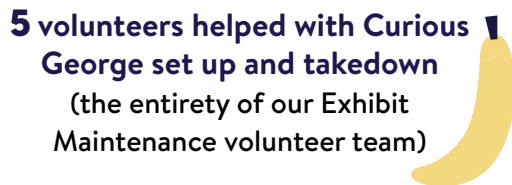
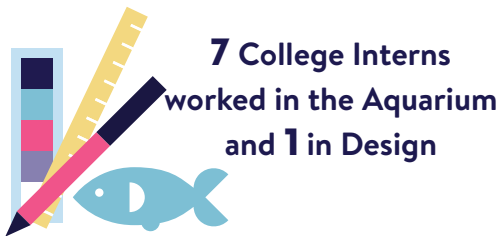
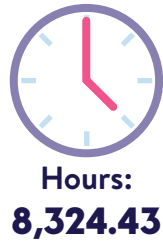
## Mind Body Me

Discovery World is excited to bring Mind Body Me to the forefront as we continue shaping the next generation of exhibit experiences. This new health-focused concept will connect science to everyday life, helping guests better understand how their bodies work and how choices shape their health. Through interactive and relatable experiences, the exhibit will explore physical, mental, and social well-being in a way only Discovery World can. With a strong emphasis on access and relevance, Mind Body Me will spark curiosity, build confidence, and support lifelong healthy habits.

# VOLUNTEER NUMBERS

We had volunteers or interns/work study students work with us in the following departments:

- Education
- Guest Services
- Museum Experiences
- Exhibit Maintenance
- Aquarium
- Marketing
- Volunteer Admin
- Design
- IT/Admin



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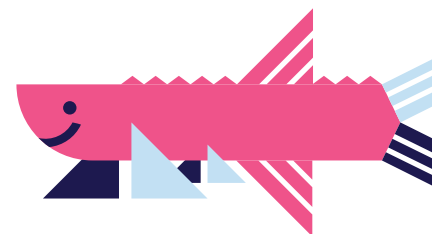
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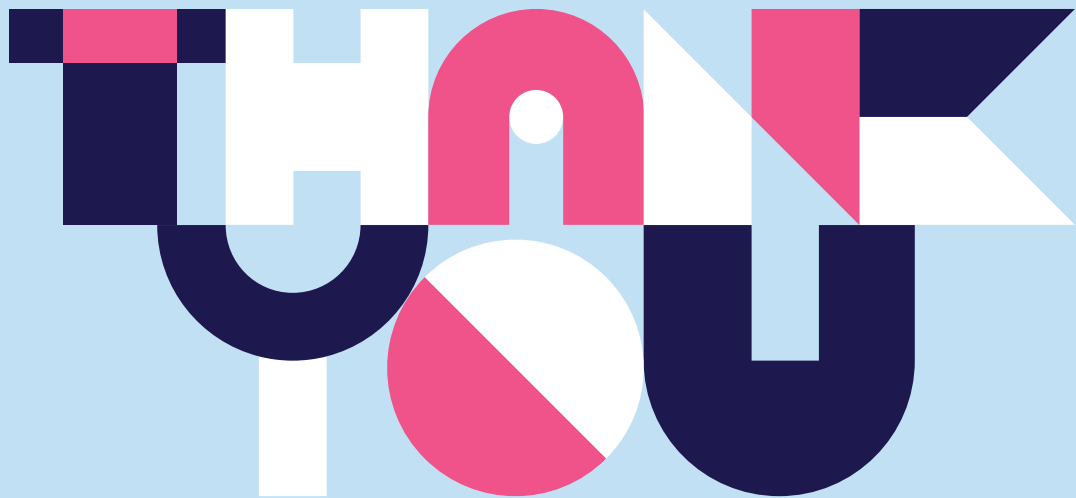
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