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Maritime Aquarium Names New CEO with Background in Banking, Nonprofit Leadership

Author : David Gurliacci

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Maureen Hanley, a businesswoman with extensive professional and charitable involvement in Fairfield County, is the new president and chief executive officer of The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk.

She's been hired to lead the aquarium through [some big challenges](#) expected to come up in the next several years, including the razing of the aquarium's IMAX theater as part of the replacement of the Walk railroad bridge over Norwalk River.

Hanley was chosen unanimously on Nov. 7 by the Executive Committee of the aquarium's Board of Trustees. Her first day will be Monday, Nov. 12.

The Easton resident is the eighth president — and third woman to hold the position — in the 30-year history of the aquarium. She replaces Dr. Brian Davis, who left in May.

Hanley comes to the Aquarium as a former community-banking executive who specialized in commercial lending. Most recently, she was a senior vice president-team leader of United Bank for the past four years.

— *See also:* [Big Changes Coming to the Maritime Aquarium](#) (Nov. 9)

She previously had risen to vice president, head of commercial real estate, at Fairfield County Bank (1994 to 2006) and senior vice president and co-chair of the SNE Diversity Council for Commerce Bank/TD Bank (2006 to 2014).

Over her 24-year banking career, she negotiated billions of dollars in loans for commercial and residential projects in Fairfield and Westchester counties, and received numerous industry awards and recognition.

She also serves (or has served) in leadership roles in numerous area organizations, including:

- Life director (2003-18), president (2013) and Woman of the Year (2016) of the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Fairfield County.
- Board member and vice president of the Cardinal Shehan Center in Bridgeport.
- former director of the Women’s Business Development Council in Stamford.
- former chair of the Housatonic Community College Good Citizen Luncheon.
- volunteer with the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Special Olympics, United Way, St. Vincent’s Medical Center Swim Across the Sound, and the Human Services Council of Norwalk.
- and the Stamford and Norwalk chambers of commerce, where she founded Women in Leadership councils for both.

Maritime Aquarium Board Chairman Michael Widland said the Aquarium will benefit from Hanley’s extensive business experience — especially in finance, construction and change management — combined with her broad connections in the community.

“For years, Maureen has been an asset to Fairfield County in so many ways, and we’re thrilled to say that she is now The Maritime Aquarium’s asset,” Widland said.

“She knows the Aquarium; she knows this community; she knows the people; she has celebrated leadership skills; and she understands the issues facing the Aquarium in the next few years.”

The Challenges

The Maritime Aquarium is about to embark on large changes in response to a federal project to replace the Walk railroad bridge that runs between the Aquarium's main building and its IMAX Theater.

The multi-year replacement of the bridge is expected to begin in about a year. Aquarium officials recently negotiated with state and federal officials for a "functional replacement" agreement to build a new 4-D theater (in place of the IMAX Theater, which must be razed) and to relocate and fortify elements of the Aquarium to be lost and impacted during the bridge work.

"The Walk bridge project won't define or consume The Maritime Aquarium," Hanley said. "We will do more than just get through this. We will thrive."

She added: "The Aquarium has developed an excellent response that ensures the high level of animal care and guest experience that our visitors have come to expect. I'm excited to see this through, but to also seek new inspiring ways to tell the Aquarium's story about Long Island Sound and to deepen the connections between our guests and our animals."

Hanley has three children: Bridget, a preschool teacher in Trumbull; RJ, a junior at Worcester Polytechnic Institute; and her youngest, Kathryn.

"We have been making visits to The Maritime Aquarium a family tradition for years, so — while my new task is to understand and lead the Aquarium as its president — I also know it as a mother," she said.

"I know the impact it can have on one child, and on a classroom of students. We will continue to pursue those life-changing experiences — for individual children, and in ways that continue to help close the achievement gap in our schools."

Hanley was born on Long Island, grew up in New Fairfield and graduated from the University of Connecticut.

The selection process for a new president began earlier this year when Davis announced his plan to return to The Georgia Aquarium, where he had been on that institution's original founding leadership team. The global executive-recruiting firm of Korn Ferry helped a special committee of Board members with the search.

The Maritime Aquarium is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to educate visitors about — and to create stewards for — Long Island Sound. It accomplishes this by allowing visitors to get close to some 300 species native to the Sound and its watershed, including sharks, seals, sea turtles, river otters, jellyfish and other animals.

One of the top places for family fun in Connecticut, the Aquarium also features hands-on educational

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programs and displays, public study cruises out onto the Sound, and Connecticut's largest IMAX movie theater, with a screen that's six stories high. TripAdvisor.com reviewers rate The Maritime Aquarium as one of the Top 20 aquariums in the U.S. and No. 1 in New England.