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# Ahoy! Nintendo & the Seattle Aquarium Partner to Bring “New Horizons” to Life

Leila Bunker, News Editor

As of Oct. 7, Nintendo of America and the Seattle Aquarium have brought the Emerald City the ultimate “critter crossover.” For a limited time, aquarium visitors have the opportunity to dive into an immersive experience that features fan-favorite characters from Animal Crossing: New Horizons.

According to the aquarium, this partnership is the first of its kind in North America. The only other Animal Crossing: New Horizons aquarium experience that has been brought to life was at the Umigatari Joetsu Aquarium in Japan.



Kay McHugh

Animal Crossing is a Nintendo game that was originally released in 2001. Since then, the franchise has gained five different versions for players to enjoy with New Horizons, an island themed game, being the latest release in 2020. Animal Crossing has become one of Nintendo’s most beloved games among fans, noted for its calming nature and quirky and iconic characters.

The aquarium’s mission is “Inspiring Conservation of Our Marine Environment” and the characters of Animal Crossing are serving as the brand ambassadors this fall. Emily Malone, the public relations specialist for the Seattle Aquarium, expressed that the partnership with Nintendo allows the aquarium to communicate the importance of marine conservation in a unique way to attendees.

“You can’t really inspire people to want to change their habits or necessarily care without being face to face and exposing people to these amazing creatures and these amazing habitats,” Malone said. “It’s about exposing people to a whole new world, and I think Animal Crossing kind of does that in its own way as well.”

Malone went on to explain that the only way to improve conditions for the ocean and marine life is to get everybody involved. Reaching out to people across different platforms allows the aquarium to do so.

As the New Horizons exhibit was assembled with the intention to be a more engaging experience, those who attend the aquarium can expect to find themed marine life descriptions that feature information directly from the game. These commentary panels are presented by the character "Blathers," an owl that is the curator of the in-game museum. One can also expect to find life-size standees of familiar characters from the game such as Isabelle, Tom Nook, Pascal and more, as well as the opportunity to play a bingo scavenger hunt via a smart device.



The Seattle Aquarium. (Hannah Sutherland)

Kaya Brown-Carveth, a second-year criminal justice major, had the opportunity to visit the aquarium in the past weekend. She expressed that she was drawn to attend because of the Animal Crossing theme. She was excited to find that one of her favorite elements of the game was included throughout the exhibits.

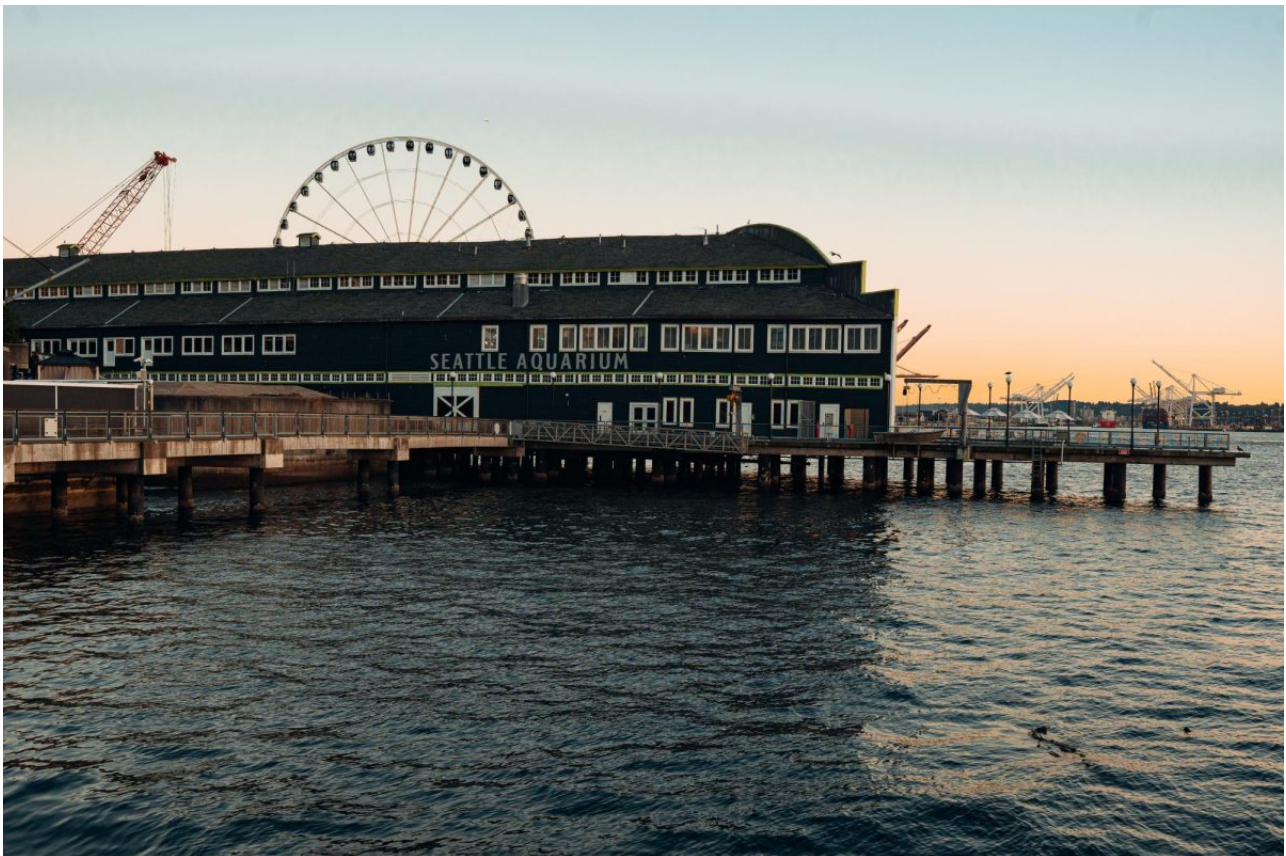
"One of the things I really enjoyed seeing the aquarium bring to life was the 'critterpedia.' I think that Animal Crossing and the aquarium both share educational aspects about themselves," Carveth said. "As someone that is an Animal Crossing lover, I thought it was really neat that the aquarium was able to incorporate the blurbs of information about the critters that the game provides its players."

Video games have become integrated into the lives of younger generations that have grown up with access to technology, whether that be a gaming console or a smartphone. With that, aquariums and institutions are constantly searching for ways to adapt to a world that has become more involved with the everyday use of technology. Partnerships like the one that the Seattle Aquarium and Nintendo share is one method that can potentially be effective in retaining the interest of young people about issues of conservation.

Eliza Blythe, a second-year environmental studies major, thinks that the collaboration between Nintendo and the aquarium is unique. However, a technology-based world worries her and what that means for younger audiences that seek to disconnect themselves in virtual ways from reality.

"Animal Crossing is based on cool things about the world that are worth exploring and protecting," Blythe said. "I think it's fun that the aquarium is using the game as a strategy to appeal to a wider audience, but I hope that people actually reflect on the importance of the message they are trying to send."

The Animal Crossing exhibition is set to run until Dec. 31 and will be on display during regular hours.



Hannah Sutherland