

# New Balance and Aquarium reach high water mark

## Donation for mammal center marks shift in foundation's strategy

BY MARY MOORE  
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The new Marine Mammal Center at the **New England Aquarium** is a coup for animal lovers, but it also marks a significant step in the relationship between a cultural institution and a foundation that was years in the making and, at first blush, may not seem the most likely.

The \$3 million donation that made the center possible also illustrates a shift in strategy for New Balance, as it has grown more comfortable with gifts that place the company in the spotlight rather than tending toward smaller, grass-roots organizations.

The New Balance gift to the Aquarium project is the most public to date for Brighton-based New Balance Foundation, which started in 1981, following a \$5 million corporate contribution the New Balance company made to the now completed **Boston Children's Museum** renovation. Foundation staff say they will be looking for more opportunities like these in the future.

Opened this month and bearing the New Balance Foundation name, the \$10 million marine mammal pavilion at the Aquarium features several fur seals with more mammals to come. While the connection between marine mammal and a shoe company may not be obvious, the shared mission certain-



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**New Balance Foundation charitable programs manager Molly Santry and New England Aquarium trainer Erin Clark with one of the residents of the Aquarium's new Marine Mammal Center. The foundation's \$3 million gift for the center is its most public to date.**

ly is: using the movement of marine mammals to inspire health and fitness among children.

"Understanding the alignment of two missions takes a long time — making sure that both missions are being advanced by the relationship and making sure both parties understand how those missions work together," said **Marjorie Ringrose**, executive director, **Social Venture Partners Boston**, which helps advise nonprofits. "That takes a lot of investment of time and energy."

In its earliest days, the foundation was a \$150-per-year Aquarium donor, its corporate membership providing an attractive benefit to New Balance

employees: free entry to the Aquarium. As New Balance became more familiar with the Aquarium — from its programs to its financial health — the foundation's donations grew in size until it was contributing \$25,000 or more each year and funding scholarships for the Aquarium's Harbor camp program.

And along came the Marine Mammal Center idea. What got the New Balance Foundation most interested was working closely with Aquarium staff to design a program that centered on a mission they agreed upon and one that is core for New Balance — healthy lifestyles for children, said **Molly Santry**, charitable programs manager for the

New Balance Foundation.

For their part, Aquarium staff began discussing the Marine Mammal Center with the New Balance Foundation before officially launching the capital campaign. And the Aquarium organized field trips for foundation staff, giving them a chance to observe the sea lions and seals, and to watch trainers at work.

"It was an experience to get up close and personal to the animals. Giving someone an experience to be side by side with trainers, to show them how marine mammals inspire people," said **Jennifer Farnsworth**, director of corporate relations, New England Aquarium.

New Balance Foundation is likely to stay on the path of supporting projects that have more public impact and with long-term partners, Santry said, adding that the foundation also will continue donating to grass-roots organizations. The foundation — who said its endowment dropped 24 percent between 2008 and 2009 — currently supports about 100 organizations and makes roughly \$6 million in grants each year.

"We now see the benefit of doing some things that are more public because they help bring awareness and attention to the organizations we're trying to benefit," said Santry. "One other thing is that consumers have come to expect more out of corporations. While we've always done our part, we've been quiet about it."

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# New Bedford sees a silver lining in green technology

BY JACKIE NOBLETT  
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For the past 30 years, New Bedford has seen the tide of manufacturing go out, taking thousands of jobs with it. But as a growing number of green-tech companies choose the seaside city to locate their production facilities, economic development officials hope it will translate into renewed vitality.

The green shoots can be seen at the New Bedford Business Park, where Executive Director **Thomas Davis** is actively recruiting clean-tech companies with spruced-up facilities and attractive rents. After going a decade without a new lease, the park has seen more than 50 deals this decade, including most recently thin-film solar technology developer **Konarka Technologies Inc.**, a service center for electric scooter company **Vectrix Corp.**, and a landfill methane gas plant operated by **Commonwealth New Bedford Energy LLC**.

"Most areas of business are flat to down. The two areas that are not are life

sciences and clean-tech," Davis said.

Down the road, **Ze-Gen Inc.** is wrapping up the retooling of its pilot waste-gassification plant to begin a second phase of large-scale testing of the technology, which first began in 2007.

"What's been great about New Bedford is there's a ready workforce. There were a lot of foundries ... and people that have worked in foundries are a great source of workers for us," said **Gideon Gradman**, vice president of corporate development.

Like many former mill cities on the South Coast, Merrimack Valley and western Massachusetts, New Bedford's receding manufacturing presence has resulted in an unemployment spike to 10.8 percent in May 2009 compared with 6.5 percent a year ago. And like the other cities, it sees clean-tech as another chance to launch a greater redevelopment.

"It's extremely important for the future to bring in new technology and new jobs," said New Bedford Mayor

**Scott Lang**. "We're not going to hit every time on every sector, but if we are able to diversify our base, that gives us more opportunities."

Arguably the best chance for that transition to succeed is on the former Polaroid site, which Konarka is redeveloping. The company received \$5 million in state loans to build there, but the major attraction, company officials say, was the actual plant and equipment.

"This was certainly more cost-effective than building a new plant from scratch," said **Larry Weldon**, vice president of manufacturing for Konarka. "The facility and equipment were ideally suited to Konarka's process, and the site gave access to experienced people in printing technologies."

Konarka was also able to hire and retrain about 20 of the Polaroid workers, and hopes to hire more than 100 employees in the next two to three years.

Under a plan being hashed out by a group of clean tech companies and economic development officials, Konarka

could be a key component to the launch of the state's first green industrial park in the city, a "manufacturing equivalent of Cambridge," Gradman said.

"There are a number of companies all going to be at a decision point as to where to locate their commercial plants, and many of these companies want to stay here," Gradman said. "If we can create a physical place for these companies to operate and collaborate together, we see it as an opportunity for New Bedford to leverage a remarkable industrial infrastructure."

And New Bedford has a distinct advantage to attracting companies that has little to do with permitting or workforce: cost.

"I tend to price lower than many of the other top-tier industrial parks," Davis said.

The price for land in New Bedford is \$85,000 per acre, Davis said.

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