

On anniversary of shutdown, Aquarium looks toward reopening

By KELLY NIX

AS MARCH 13 marks the 1-year anniversary of the day the Monterey Bay Aquarium had to unceremoniously close its doors, its executive director said this week it's possible the attraction could reopen within a few weeks.

The aquarium's 100 percent loss of admissions for a full year has meant a staggering \$55 million revenue shortfall and brought a 40 percent reduction of its workforce. In 2019, more than 1.9 million people visited the aquarium.

But executive director Julie Packard said Thursday afternoon "she's "cautiously optimistic" that the aquarium "will be able to open our doors in a few weeks — for the first time in more than a year."

When it does reopen, however, the aquarium will be a different experience for visitors. The auditorium, some smaller exhibits and children's attractions, such as the Splash Zone, will remain closed as safety precautions,

spokesman Emerson Brown told The Pine Cone.

Not surprisingly, there will be "extremely strict safety measures" to protect staff and guests, including timed entry, a plan to regulate visitor density and flow, and, at least initially, a state-mandated 25 percent limit on the number of guests at any one time. Visitors will be directed through most of the aquarium's galleries on a one-way, linear path.

Safety measures

Guests 3 and older and staff will be required to wear face coverings while inside the aquarium and on its oceanfront deck, Brown said, and people will also be asked to maintain the obligatory 6-foot distance from others.

"The measures we have in place go above state safety measures," he said. "Also, we're constantly learning from other aquariums and zoos, which had been allowed to open in other states."

To minimize the risk of coronavirus transmission, visi-

tors will no longer be able to purchase tickets at the door, and will have to buy them online — preferably in advance and not the same day. But aquarium-goers will be glad to know that there are no plans to raise ticket prices.

Despite the safety provisions, the aquarium will still offer its guests some of the most spectacular marine exhibits and animals in the world.

"People will be able to enjoy seeing all the major exhibits and animals for which the aquarium is known," Brown said.

Precisely when the aquarium will be allowed to welcome back customers is still hazy. Monterey County could be moved from the most restrictive Purple Tier to the Red Tier — which would allow the aquarium and other sectors to reopen — as early as next week, according to state reopening guidelines announced this week.

"We're following the county's case numbers closely, and were glad to see more positive progress in the weekly update," Brown said. "With the information we have at this point in time, however, we simply don't know when our reopening date will be."



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Concours Week plans are all over the place

■ City events all up in the air

By MARY SCHLEY

AS MORE and more people are vaccinated against the coronavirus and infection rates decline, will some of the Monterey Peninsula's most popular summer events, such as the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, be back on the calendar this year?

Some organizers say they'll be able to have their celebrations, while others are waiting.

"We are planning on it," said Kandace Hawkinson, who handles marketing for the Concours d'Elegance, which is scheduled for Aug. 15, along with the accompanying Tour d'Elegance the Thursday before. Tickets are being sold, and those who still have their 2020 tickets are already on the list.

"To ensure the safety of participants, we will, of course, follow all Covid-19 regulations and CDC guidelines in place at that time," she said, though she acknowledged it's too early to know what those will be.

"We're selling tickets and have fingers and toes crossed that nothing will happen, and that the way the state and county are clearing up, we'll have spectators," said Barry Toepke at WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca, which hosts the vintage car races the first weekend of Car Week and the Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion at the end of it.

"Car events are outside in wide open spaces," he pointed out.

Gordon and Molly McCall have reconfigured the displays of cars and aircraft, and stations for food and wine at their McCall's Motorworks Revival at the Monterey Jet Center to accommodate social distancing and are taking numerous other measures to prepare for any situation. The event is scheduled for Aug. 11.

"We've spread it out and doubled the footprint," Molly McCall said.

"We've had it capped at 3,000 people since 2000, but if we need to cut it back, we can," Gordon McCall added.

Plenty of space

Rick Barnett, organizer of the Concours at Pasadera, was the last to cancel a car event last year and said planning is well underway for this year's show. Considering its small size — 100 cars and between 400 and 800 participants — and the country club's spaciousness, he anticipates no trouble in accommodating social distancing and any other coronavirus-related restrictions and practices.

"We believe that we can create a safety standard that meets or exceeds any requirements that would come our way," Barnett said, adding that with one way in and out of Pasadera, access is easy to control.

Doug Freedman, who organizes the Concours on the Avenue in downtown Carmel along with his wife Genie,

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Judges inspect a 1905 Clement SD Sedan at the 2012 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.