

Media: For more information, contact SeaWorld Public Relations at (619) 226-3929.

SEAWORLD'S GRAND DAME, BUBBLES THE PILOT WHALE

It's hard to find an animal with a more legendary career than SeaWorld's short-finned pilot whale superstar, Bubbles. This *grande dame's* career spans more than 40 years. "I've never known an animal with a more impressive air spin, where she jumps out of the water and spins around at lightning speed," says Bill Winhall, assistant curator at SeaWorld San Diego and one of Bubbles' original caretakers at Marineland of the Pacific, once located along the coast of Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif., where Bubbles career first began. "So much of what we do at SeaWorld today was learned in those early days," he adds.

Currently, SeaWorld Supervisor of Animal Training Kristi Burtis works with Bubbles. "One of Bubbles' best traits is her diplomatic nature. Along with Shadow, Bubbles' companion pilot whale and best buddy, she has a knack of bringing stability to the diverse mammal community." Burtis also describes how Bubbles is fascinated with the younger dolphins and when things get a bit rambunctious in the pool, Bubbles and Shadow, "the pilot whale police," step in to calm things down.

Burtis, Bubbles' primary trainer, who has worked with her for almost 10 years, has found that the best way to gain trust is to just spend down time with her. "During breaks, I enjoy teaching her new water-work behaviors." Burtis says that's it's during these moments that Bubbles has taught her a few lessons about life. "Creativity, patience, and how to be more open to change are all important lessons I've learned from her."

At approximately 47 years old, Bubbles is one of the oldest marine mammals at SeaWorld and perhaps at any park, according to SeaWorld senior veterinarian Tom Reidarson. "She definitely holds a very special place in my heart," he says. "As a child, I visited Bubbles at Marineland many times and she quickly became my favorite animal. I can't tell you how excited I was to become her veterinarian when I joined the SeaWorld team in 1991. Over the years, we've become very close."

It seems that Bubbles was born to be a superstar. As a young 12-foot-long, 1,600-pound female pilot whale, she began her expansive career at Marineland in the 1960s and was eventually given her own stadium and placed center stage. Her talent and allure made her an international superstar. Bubbles was a hit at

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Marineland for more than two decades. In 1987, Bubbles came to her new home at SeaWorld San Diego.

Over the next 20 years, Bubbles performed in various dolphin shows at SeaWorld, including the most recent production, "Dolphin Discovery." The final performance of "Dolphin Discovery" took place in May 2009 to make way for a new show. These days, Bubbles and her companions are gearing up for "Blue Horizons" — a spectacular production featuring pilot whales, dolphins, exotic birds and amazing aerialists and divers — scheduled to open May 2010. After a career spanning more than four decades, Bubbles will continue to jump, dive and splash to the delight of her dedicated fans. And not to disappoint, Bubbles' signature air spin will be the highlight of the show's pilot whale sequence.

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