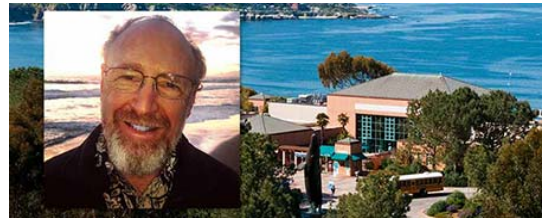


October 08, 2015 | By Hallie Johnson

Birch Aquarium Announces New Executive Director

UC San Diego Alumnus Harry Helling to Lead Birch Aquarium at Scripps

Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego, has named UC San Diego alumnus Harry Helling as its new executive director. Helling, who started his career more than 30 years ago as an associate curator at the T. Wayland Vaughan Aquarium on the Scripps Oceanography campus, is a passionate leader with extensive experience communicating and interpreting science for the public. Helling will begin at the aquarium the week of October 12, 2015.



Harry Helling, new executive director at UC San Diego's Birch Aquarium at Scripps

Birch Aquarium at Scripps is a leading provider of informal ocean science education in the San Diego region and the public exploration center for the world-renowned Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. In addition to its 65,000-square-foot facility featuring more than 6,000 fish and invertebrates, the aquarium hosts lectures, public programs, community events, and outdoor excursions throughout the year.

“Harry Helling stands out as someone with the vision and innovative thinking to take Birch Aquarium at Scripps to the next level of excellence in science education and outreach,” said Margaret Leinen, UC San Diego’s vice chancellor for marine science and director of Scripps. “It is exciting to look forward to working with Harry on inventive new approaches to educating the public about how Scripps and UC San Diego science advances our understanding and protection of the planet.”

Most recently, Helling served as the President and CEO of the Crystal Cove Alliance at Crystal Cove State Park in Newport Coast, Calif. There, he led the development of innovative K-12 marine science education programs such as an ocean acidification lab and an after-school

bioacoustics and endangered-bird monitoring program. He also contributed to conservation planning by developing partnerships with land managers, researchers, NGOs, and user groups to improve science-based resource management across a 40,000-acre reserve.

In addition, he just completed six years as founding board chair of The Ecology Center, a new nonprofit devoted to Orange County's only organic farm, promoting sustainable solutions for water, energy, food, and shelter.

Previously, Helling was executive vice president, education and program development, at the Ocean Institute in Dana Point, Calif. For 14 years, he served as director of the Dana Point Marine Life Refuge and founder of the Orange County Marine Protected Area Council, a countywide collaborative focused on improving enforcement, science, and education in the area's most sensitive marine habitat. The effort served as a model for marine protected area collaboration and has been replicated in 14 locations across California, including San Diego.

"Birch Aquarium at Scripps is an important collaborator to us at the Aquarium of the Pacific in engaging the public with ocean and environmental issues," said Jerry Schubel, president and chief executive officer of Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, Calif. "I look forward to working with Mr. Helling to fulfill our shared mission of providing world-class ocean science education and advancing the dialogue on how to best provide stewardship for Southern California's coast and ocean into the future."

"I worked with Harry Helling when he was the head of the Ocean Institute, and I was always amazed at the way he brought science and discovery into the classroom and engaged students with hands-on activities. Harry is an education and outreach juggernaut," said Neal Driscoll, a geoscientist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography and a member of the Aquarium-Museum Advisory Panel at Scripps.

Helling earned his bachelor's degree from UC San Diego in cultural anthropology and master's degree in science and environmental education from California State University, Humboldt. At Birch Aquarium, Helling is replacing former executive director Nigella Hillgarth, who is currently the president and CEO of the New England Aquarium.

The mission of Birch Aquarium is to provide ocean science education, to interpret Scripps Institution of Oceanography research, and to promote ocean conservation. In February 2015, [Price Philanthropies](#), led by Robert and Allison Price, donated \$6 million to establish the Price Philanthropies Ocean Science Education Fund. Along with other generous supporters, the gift established the new endowment that will provide hands-on ocean science education to thousands of underserved students each year.

Perched on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the nonprofit Birch Aquarium at Scripps features more than 60 habitats of fish and invertebrates from the cold waters of the Pacific Northwest to the tropical waters of Mexico and the western Pacific. An interactive museum showcases research discoveries by Scripps scientists on climate, earth, and ocean science, and features five-dozen interactive elements. Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Birch Aquarium has an annual attendance of more than 420,000, including 40,000 school children.

MEDIA CONTACT

Mario Aguilera, 858-822-5148, maguilera@ucsd.edu

Hallie Johnson, 858-822-0774 h6johnson@ucsd.edu

UC San Diego's [Studio Ten 300](#) offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via studio@ucsd.edu. To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts>.