



NATIONAL MISSISSIPPI RIVER MUSEUM & AQUARIUM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

**EMBARGOED
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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Jerry Enzler, Executive Director
John Sutter, Director of Marketing & Sales
563-557-9545

IMAGINE A LIFELESS GULF

Dubuque, Iowa – June 18, 2010 — The National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium will open its \$40 million expansion, the Diamond Jo National River Center, on June 26, 2010. The expansion will include a new Gulf of Mexico exhibit. However, the Gulf exhibit will not open as a celebration of a vibrant, life-filled Gulf; instead it will be empty and completely devoid of life.

The Gulf Coast oil spill is the worst environmental disaster of its kind in our nation's history. The Museum & Aquarium believes that the most appropriate course is to open a Gulf exhibit recognizing the crisis that is happening on the Gulf Coast. The Museum & Aquarium and its national partners believe this should cause everyone to pause and consider the delicate balance of life in our oceans. The Gulf is just as important as the life it holds, and the Museum & Aquarium is choosing to offer its visitors the opportunity to learn and reflect upon this significant and tragic event. A dramatic depiction of the effects of the oil spill will be presented in the aquarium gallery next to the lifeless aquariums. Educational materials, hands-on activities, multi-media exhibits and information about how to get involved will be presented.

With the exhibit opening approaching and the Gulf now in crisis, the Museum & Aquarium faced a dilemma. The board and staff have decided that opening a Gulf of Mexico exhibit at this time requires a compassionate and factual representation of the Gulf crisis.

The intent of the Gulf of Mexico exhibit is to draw a connection between the Mississippi River and the ocean and to bring to light the devastating effects of the oil spill. The exhibit, without fish, now has the opportunity to make a bold statement related to the oil spill in the Gulf Coast by asking Museum & Aquarium visitors to imagine a lifeless Gulf.

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To help present this vital message, the Museum & Aquarium is working with the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, several other federal agencies; as well as the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, the Museum & Aquarium's Great River Road Network of 65 interpretive centers on the Mississippi River, partnership with 24 of Coastal America Learning Centers and other zoos and aquariums across the country. With help from these partners the Museum & Aquarium intends to spread the message that protecting the Gulf and responding to this disaster belongs to all of us, even in the Midwest and the entire Mississippi River Basin.

The National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium is the lead interpretive center for America's rivers. The Museum & Aquarium interprets both the cultural and environmental history of the great American rivers with a mission to preserve river history and the rivers themselves. The 10-acre riverfront campus is located on the banks of the Mississippi River in Dubuque, Iowa. The National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium has more than 250,000 visitors annually and a national membership of nearly 5,000. It has also received national recognition for its exhibits and programming.

What does Dubuque, Iowa, have to do with the Gulf of Mexico? About 3.3 Million gallons of water per second, that's what! That's the amount of water the Mississippi River flows into the Gulf every second. That's 285 Billion gallons (285,120,000,000) of Mississippi river water entering the Gulf each day!

For more information please call 563-557-9545 or visit www.rivermuseum.com.

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