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Virginia Living Museum wins elite status through dual accreditation

By [Mark St. John Erickson](#) | 247-4783

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NEWPORT NEWS - The [Virginia Living Museum](#) joined an elite group of zoos and museums this week when it became the first institution in the state — and only the 12th in the country — to earn accreditation from both the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the American Association of Museums.

The pioneering natural history and wildlife museum received its certification from the AZA on Tuesday following a hearing on its application. It has been accredited by the AAM since 1976, when it became one of the first museums in the state to meet the organization's operating standards.

"The staff has worked for nearly two years in preparation for this accreditation," Living Museum Executive Director Page Hayhurst said, describing the rigorous process of meeting the AZA's benchmarks for animal care and exhibition.

"It is recognition by our peers that we meet the highest standard in the country — and that is possible only with the staff's passion for their work and their institution."

Despite the museum's long record of accreditation from the AAM, Hayhurst and her colleagues decided to pursue a second certification more than two years ago because of the large number of animals used in their exhibits and programs.

The museum's collection includes hundreds of animals ranging over more than 250 species, and accreditation by the national consortium of zoos and aquariums not only validates the quality of its care but makes it easier to acquire new specimens from other institutions.

In addition to a comprehensive self-evaluation, the accreditation process required a detailed application and a meticulous on-site inspection by a team of specially trained zoo and aquarium professionals.

The inspecting team observed all aspects of the Living Museum's operation in such critical areas as animal care — including the living environment and daily enrichment of the animals. They also examined the museum's standards for keeper training, educational programs, conservation efforts and veterinary programs as well as its financial stability, risk management policies and visitor services.

"Only the very best zoos and aquariums can meet and maintain AZA accreditation standards," AZA President and CEO Jim Maddy said in a statement announcing the approval of the Living Museum's application.

"[Newport News](#) should be proud to have one of the top facilities in North America as a valuable community asset and economic engine."

The AZA accredits 217 institutions around the country, while 776 institutions are accredited by AAM.

Dual accreditation is held by city zoos in Cincinnati, [Indianapolis](#), Los Angeles, Louisville, [Oklahoma City](#), [San Diego](#) and [Tulsa](#) as well as the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery in Dayton, [Ohio](#); the Natural Science Center in Greensboro, [N.C.](#); the New England Aquarium in Boston; and the San Diego Wild Animal Park.