



AMDA is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting environmentally responsible marine aquarium keeping as an entertaining, educational, and worthwhile leisure time activity.

## American Marinelife Dealers Association

## WESTERN MARINE CONFERENCE A SUCCESS!

By Mary Middlebrook

The Western Marine Conference was held in beautiful Monterey, California April 6-8. The AMDA booth was manned by President Randy Goodlett and MAC Representative Mary Middlebrook. During the conference we handed out information about AMDA, spoke with potential members and hobbyists about our future goals, and held a raffle that raised over \$250. We also distributed flyers for members AquaTouch, Aquarium Currents, and Sea Critters and brochures for the Marine Aquarium Council. Generous donations from the following companies were key in getting attendees to stop by our booth and "check us out"! Special thanks go out to the following companies for their support of AMDA at the WMC:

- Creative Plastics Research (CPR)**- Donated a 25 gallon display tank that will be transported for use at all future shows attended by AMDA.
- Custom Sea Life**- Donated the lighting system for the 25 gallon display tank.
- Aquanetics**- Donated a 25 wt. UV Sterilizer for our raffle.
- Fritz**- Donated various reef tank additives for our raffle.
- Walt Smith International**- Donated aquacultured corals and aquacultured live rock for our raffle.
- Marine Specialties International**- Donated aquacultured corals and Southdown Sand for the raffle. Provided the 80 gallon display tank.
- Coral Reef Ecosystems**- Donated a Metal Halide Bulb for our raffle.

The conference was organized by SEABAY, an aquarium club based in the San Francisco area. Hosts John Susbilla, Bill Smith, Rex Neidermeyer, and Rod Leong were so wonderful- they helped us set up, tear down, and somehow

remembered to bring everything we forgot! Thanks guys! AMDA's next "public appearance" is scheduled to be at MACNA in Baltimore, MD August 17-19. That is where we will hold our annual face to face board meeting, and we will be holding a public meeting as well. For more information, please see page 2. Hope to see you there!



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## NEW ATTITUDE, NEW LOOK!

AMDA has been moving forward very quickly these past few months! The board has been tackling some of the major membership issues that have plagued AMDA in the past, including renewals, accountability, and benefits. In keeping with "out with the old, in with the new," the board has decided to adopt a new logo that better captures the new spirit of AMDA. See the top of the following pages for our new look!

## Incoming Tide

### AMDA WELCOMES OUR NEW MEMBERS

- Aquatic Art Technologies, LLC- Glastonbury, CT
- Aquatic Concepts (rejoin) - Westbrook, Maine
- Island Aquarium Services - Key West, FL
- Ornamental Mariculture, INC - Davie, FL
- Rainbow Reefs, INC - Las Vegas, NV
- SeaCare Maricultures Products - Chilliwack, BC Canada
- The Reef Store, INC - Alpharetta, GA
- Ecovitality- San Jose, CA
- Go Fish- Westbrook, CT
- The Coalition of Reef Lovers- Grand Rapids, MI
- Wet Pets & Friends- McMurry, PA



## DID YOU KNOW???

Handling Sea Urchins can be a prickly task! Next time you have to get that Sea Urchin out of a bag or tank, go to your kitchen first! Pick up the urchin with a pair of salad tongs... it's perfectly safe for the animals, and easy on your fingers too!

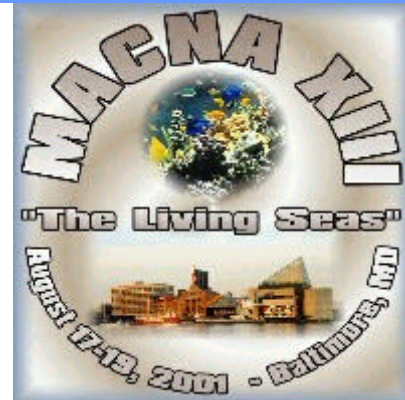
## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Randolph Goodlett

I attended a MACNA years ago in Cleveland and I actually sat in on the first meeting of the group that was to become AMDA. I remembered thinking "getting the stores organized to represent the industry is a great idea" and then I didn't hear much more. It wasn't until a couple of years later, when I had left the public aquarium field and had become a full time service company that I had time to find out what AMDA was doing. Their goals were still very good ones and they had a good nucleus of people involved, but the seedling that was AMDA was having a difficult time growing. This industry is an interesting one and a unique one in many ways. People who enter it to make a lot of money quickly learn that there are many easier ways to succeed. Those that stay in it do so for the love of the industry. I know of few groups of professionals who work so hard to make so little and yet continue to do so year after year. So why do we do it? Why do we work so hard to provide our customers with quality aquaria and a wide variety of gorgeous animals and plants to go within? Because we love working with these animals and because we love how they thrive and grow in well designed aquaria and how they bring great joy to our customers. And because we want people to have an appreciation for real coral reefs and coastal shores. Maybe there are some individuals who are really in it just for the money...but I believe most of us take conservation of the world's reefs and coastal shores very seriously. That is also why many of us in this business want to clean it up...from the bad collecting methods to the negligent holding facilities to the poor shipping practices and right through to the poorly run retail facility. Years ago AMDA thought that we could correct the problems simply by educating people. That only had a limited effect. MAC (the Marine Aquarium Council) was conceived at that time to pull together all of the people who needed to have input to really change the industry. This included businesses, consultants, biologists, non-profit specialists, public aquarium officials, hobbyists and government officials from several countries. It is a much larger body than AMDA and it has finally begun to make some headway. This is partially because the US Government has joined it's ranks, and now that legislation may be enacted to affect the industry, professionals in the industry are beginning to take serious notice. This year will be a banner year for our industry...not because profits will go way up or because we will grow in numbers. It will be a year remembered for pilot programs that will start up and that could become the working models for how we do business as an industry. These programs will support coral reef conservation through sustainable harvesting and allow us as an industry to provide our customers with the best in quality marine animals and plants. It will also be a pivotal year for AMDA. Last year we made big strides in finalizing several programs that had been in the planning for years. However, if last year was a year of progress at good speed,

this year we are going into hyperdrive. Last year the board could count on 4 to 5 people to work on issues and programs. This year we have 10 very active board members and we are off to a very fast start. Although you may have been contacted on occasion in the past, this year you will receive a lot of communication from AMDA. And you will hear about a wide variety of new or updated programs and benefits. If you aren't signed up to the new AMDA e-mail message board, please do so right away (contact Mary Middlebrook)...we are updating members on a regular basis on our message boards and on our website. We will now be very pro-active on answering any and all inquiries and/or concerns. And if you have been mulling over the idea of getting a computer to be able to go online... please do so. Our board members are very active in this venue. So don't be strangers...give us a call or send us an e-mail and tell us what's on your mind. AMDA is listening.

## UPCOMING EVENTS



**AMDA will be holding a public meeting for all members. Please plan on attending! Visit [www.masna.org](http://www.masna.org) for more details.**

**Backer Pet Industry Christmas Trade Show  
October 12-14, Chicago, IL- Information will be posted as it becomes available.**



**November 26-December 1  
Orlando, FL**

<http://gnv2.ifas.ufl.edu/~conferweb/MO/>



## DID YOU KNOW???

When acclimating fish, the ammonia from the bag water becomes more toxic as the pH rises. To help prevent this potentially fatal problem, use small pieces of Poly-Filter...it will absorb ammonia.

### THE MODERN MARINE RETAILER SERIES- PART ONE

By Rick Oellers

**This is the first in a series of articles focusing on helping marine retailers survive in the ever changing landscape of the aquarium industry.**

The retail industry has been going through more changes in the last ten years than the last fifty years combined. With hard hitting competition from mail order, internet and the influx of superstores, it is no wonder that the once prosperous downtown America retail industry resembles a ghost town with going out of business signs and empty storefronts. How can a small business retailer, selling marine fish and supplies, survive and still hold the ethics that AMDA members hold dear. In this series of articles I hope give you a few tips to help you not only survive but thrive. I have been in the retail trade since 1973 and have always had a successful business. The only reason I sold my store, Aquatic Concepts, is I wanted to devote more time to family and my service business was enough to support me nicely.

The first thing you must have is a positive attitude. At a recent marine conference, I heard two AMDA members speak during an open discussion. The first was retailer complaining about the unfair competition he was having from low balling irresponsible dealers, superstores and mail order. I couldn't help but think how this attitude must reflect on his customers and employees. I personally feel that a negative attitude produces a negative response. The next member spoke how he welcomed the competition. "Bring it on" he said with a gesture that resembled a prizefighter ready to fight. This guy felt...no, knew that the quality of marinelifelife, knowledge and retail presentation would bring all those new hobbyist eventually to his store. The owner one of the largest mail order companies in the country told me that if I tried to compete with him on price, he would "bury me". He also said that he was tired of us "sniveling cry baby retailers" complaining about him. He told me that if I couldn't handle the competition, that I had no business being in the industry. You know what? He was right. He later gave me advise that, when applied, contributed to an increase of my business of over 40% the first year. Aquatic Concepts today is alive and thriving. He told me that he could not compete with me on providing knowledge to my customers, merchandising presentation and most of all service. Scott, wherever you are, I thank you. The rest of this article will share a few of the merchandising tips I picked up over the years, starting with purchasing your hard goods.

Selection of merchandise is critical. Before you even look at pricing, take a walk over to your competition, especially the superstores. Jot down the brand name heaters, filters, etc that they carry. Make sure that you carry a different brand that is as good, if not better, quality than theirs. Your customers will not be able to compare prices.

Your quality, "responsibly caught" fish are your key to repeat business. I had a retailer near me get very upset because the customers would pay \$ 59.99 for a healthy Christmas Island flame angel that was quarantined and eating, instead of the \$ 14.99 angels he was selling right out of a transshipped box. Needless to say he is not an AMDA dealer. The customer will soon learn that especially in fish, quality counts. Spend the extra time to find those rare and unusual fishes the competition has never heard of. Many of my customers couldn't wait until "fish day" to see what odd ball treasures I would bring in.

Keeping track of the newest merchandise is critical as well. If nothing else, the new "toys" you will find at the MACNA conference or a trade show are well worth the trip, if you can get them in your store before the competition. Check out the latest hobby magazines to see what is new and what the consumer is looking for. Also check with AMDA wholesalers who deal with marine merchandise to see what they have brought in. Display the new items on your counter with a sign marked "New Item", making sure you and your employees know as much as possible of the product. Every item we sold in my store we would try out to make sure it met our standards.

Many of us are great fish keepers, but lousy merchandisers. Take a good look at your front counter. There are two things that should be on it. First of all, you should have "point of sale" items. These are items that are small that most consumers will buy on impulse. Lettuce clips, airstones or sample sizes of additives or foods will work for the impulse sale. Even a small bowl of .25 cent candy will do as an impulse sale. I know, you are saying "I am a fish store not a candy store", but every little sale does help. The other items on the register could be the newest book on reef keeping or any new item that will not take up too much room. The idea is to get the customer to notice your merchandise and ask about it.

In the next issue I will cover more on merchandising as well as tips for getting the best wholesale price for your merchandise. Until then I wish you a healthy and prosperous Spring.

Judy Shaner, our elected regional director for the North Central

**URGENT! REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
POSITION OPEN!**

region, has had to resign due to personal reasons. She will be missed! We need to immediately fill her position. You do not have to reside in this region to serve as director. Job duties include attending bi-monthly online board meetings, contacting the members in your area when issues arise, reporting changes in membership contact information, and fielding comments/questions from the members. Please contact our Regional Director at Large, Steve Ruddy, at [steve@coralreefecosystems.com](mailto:steve@coralreefecosystems.com) or 707-838-2492 for more information.



## DID YOU KNOW???

The relationship between certain shrimps and gobies is unique and interesting to observe. However, you should never introduce the shrimp after the goby. Even the best of the shrimp gobies can't resist eating their potential best friend.

## RETAIL REMEDIES... IMPROVING ON THE REPLACEMENT POLICY

**By Jim Kostich**

It's all too inevitable: occasionally even the best of tropical fish retailers has a customer complain that a saltwater fish or invertebrate got sick or died shortly after purchase. How that situation is handled reflects not only on the dealer's business sense, but on his business ethics as well.

Most livestock replacement policies are anchored in one of the two extremes of all or nothing. For marine livestock, many shops opt for the "No Guarantee, No Replacement" policy, which makes all purchases at the buyer's risk. Often, a brief explanation of the reason for this policy, such as "Due to their delicate nature...", is given in the tank or fish room signage. This policy protects the shop from losses due to customer mishandling or negligence, but also allows poorly run operations to reject their own responsibilities and pass problems on to the consumer.

Other shops take the opposite approach, with an unconditional, full replacement guarantee for a given number of hours or days. Sometimes the replacement is prorated over the time period, possibly offering full replacement the first 24 hours, half the next day, and so on. This is obviously a sales enhancement, and hopefully results in the seller taking his responsibilities of livestock care and customer education more seriously. However, it's also possible for the seller to take the Mass Merchandiser outlook, not caring about the losses as long as the bottom line is holding it's own. Furthermore, some consumers take advantage of such liberal policies and purchase specimens that they are not prepared to care for, in the knowledge that they can exchange the bodies of their victims for full credit if it doesn't work out.

In the end, every retailer will undoubtedly adapt one of the above policies to meet his requirements, but hopefully the ethical dealer will realize that the replacement policy by itself does little to protect the interests of the livestock. However, tying the replacement policy to other store procedures can go a long way towards a satisfactory outcome for everyone - and everything - involved.

One example of this would be to allow partial or full credit when the customer provides reasonable evidence of satisfactory conditions in his home aquarium. Many stores provide free or low-cost water testing already, and this can often provide valuable clues as to why a specimen was lost. A close inspection of the body might also shed some light if a fish died due to aggression or infection. Questions can be asked regarding other important factors such as temperature and suitable food availability.

It is crucial that the customer sees this as a fact-finding mission, rather than a third-degree interrogation to find some loophole for the dealer to escape his responsibility. The focus should be on preventing further problems and educating the hobbyist, rather than assessing blame. In fact, it would not be out of the question to offer partial credit even if the customer is shown to have somehow caused the loss.

For those dealers that prefer a no-guarantee type policy, emphasis should be placed on alternatives **before** the sale. This might be as simple as just making certain that the consumer is aware of all the requirements of the livestock he plans to purchase. Questions should be asked regarding the tank size, how long it's been in use, temperature, salinity, nitrates, foods offered and tankmates. The specimen itself should also be closely examined, and perhaps given a small amount of food to assure that it has adjusted to its current quarters before going on to the next. The date of arrival of this specimen should also be provided to the customer as evidence that it was not newly acquired. Any special requirements of the species should also be pointed out at this time.

Offering a "hold" period wherein the animal is put aside for the customer for several days or weeks before pickup is a reasonable substitute for a warranty. The customer pays a deposit up front, then the dealer is responsible to keep that fish or invertebrate in good health until the pickup date. If the animal is unhealthy or dead at that time, the deposit should be fully refunded, as the "merchandise" was clearly proven to be "defective". If the specimen is healthy, the customer is expected to pick it up promptly or forfeit his deposit. In this way, the responsibility and risk is fairly shouldered by whichever party currently has custody.

Whatever policy is implemented should be fully understood by prospective customers before purchase. This not only heads off some heated discussions in the future, but also is only fair. The retailer certainly can't expect the hobbyist to play by rules that he is unaware of. A few signs in the livestock area can convey the bulk of the message, and small consumer handouts can explain the policies - and the reasoning behind them - more fully.



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## DID YOU KNOW???

Can't seem to figure out where that phosphate keeps coming from? It could be your activated carbon. Soak a sample in distilled water for 24 hours and test to see if the brand your using or selling is good or not.

### NETTING KNOWLEDGE

Business professionals use every tool possible to create success. The internet offers a wide range of information for you...animal husbandry & identification, new technologies, product information, and much more! Each newsletter will highlight a website of particular interest to AMDA members. Please take a moment to visit the featured site, and don't forget to check out AMDA's site at [www.amdareef.com!!](http://www.amdareef.com!!)

# FISH 'N' CHIPS

By: Elizabeth M. Lukan

<http://petsforum.com/fishnchips/>

Fish 'N' Chips is a free monthly newsletter for the marine hobbyist. Each issue is emailed to subscribers in HTML format. The first issue was published in October 1998. I think it went out to 30 people tops. Fish 'N' Chips now has nearly 1000 subscribers world wide. Fish 'N' Chips is ad and sponsor free.

Articles include Critter Corner which features a fish, coral or invert, Do It Yourself plans and projects, propagation, skimmer reviews, and more. Regular sections include tips, new happenings at Reefs UK ([www.reefsuk.org](http://www.reefsuk.org)), new articles, etc. found online, upcoming events online and across the globe, and more. Every issue of Fish 'N' Chips is available on the website. They can be viewed online or downloaded, complete with images, for viewing offline. The website also contains a unique site list. All sites are categorized by site type (info, vendor) and what is on the site (articles, message boards) or what the site sells (hardware, livestock). The sites are also listed in an alphabetical section for easy finding. Subscriber Tank Showcases are also featured on the site. Some great looking tanks and critters get shown off here each month.

I am currently working on an Anemone Questionnaire with the founders of the International Marine Aquarists Forum ([www.tanktalk.com](http://www.tanktalk.com)), Frank Greco, Dr. Daphne Fautin, and Robert J. Toonen. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather as much information as possible regarding the captive keeping of anemones. This questionnaire will bring in world wide responses and will provide a stepping stone to further research.

More projects are planned for Fish 'N' Chips from setting up our own Web Ring to publishing Critter Care Sheets with the members of the International Marine Aquarists Forum. The future of Fish 'N' Chips looks busy, but bright.

I love my hobby and that is why Fish 'N' Chips was born. The destruction of the world's reefs doesn't need to happen to sustain our hobby. With a family and my own web design business life is busy, but I find the time to do my part for my hobby. Fish 'N' Chips is my part.

## FEATURED MEMBER: AQUATIC CONCEPTS

Located just outside Portland you will find a store that should be the poster child of AMDA, Aquatic concepts. Aquatic Concepts has been on a corner of Main Street, downtown Westbrook for almost ten years. The original owner opened this store due to the lack of quality marine fish/invertebrates and up to date quality equipment. At the start, this store was a hit with frustrated aquarium keepers. The current owners Wally and Cindy Galo still hold the high standards that built the business. Boasting over 200 aquariums, Wally has no problem with the two Superstores within a five-mile distance from his door. "They are my best source of new customers," says Wally with a gleam in his eye. In fact when Petco opened its store Cindy called them up to welcome them to the neighborhood and they continue to send business back and forth. Since there are no independent stores in the area and Cindy only carries aquatics, she makes a point in calling the stores to let them know she is sending them a customer for dog food etc. "Every customer they set up, inevitably ends up in my store," says Cindy. Cindy does find it frustrating to undo the mistakes and misinformation that these stores produce. Aquatic Concepts tanks are clean and not overcrowded. They have a quarantine bank of tanks that hold newly arrived fish for three weeks, until they are ready for sale. They also have a tank raised section that has twenty-four aquariums of fish, invertebrates and corals. Wally has plans for twelve more this month. This store sells only mariculture live rock, because they feel wild rock is habitat. Wally says he has been tempted by those one dollar per pound offers for wild pacific rock, but he has to stand by his ethics. They also have a nice selection of artificial corals, from various companies, for those customers that prefer the sterile old school image. The coral selection is superb in quality. Cindy feels it is because they do not transship. Most of these corals come from Marine Specialties International (another AMDA member). They feel the care these corals and fish receive on the West Coast is far superior because of the break the critters get, compared to East Coast wholesalers. While Cindy works the store full time, Wally doubles as a salesperson and runs the store service department servicing homes and business. The extra income for service helps during the harsh winter storms or when warmer weather arrives and customers let the aquarium go on hold. Leasing of equipment also adds to the stores income. Running a store in Maine is challenging. Since most of the livestock comes for Florida or California, Cindy must keep an eye on the airline schedules and the weather map at the same time. A major snowstorm can cost hundreds of dollars on lost livestock if a flight is stuck in Cincinnati. Since the only other AMDA store within a hundred miles is Inland Reef aquarium in New Hampshire, Wally and Cindy are set for a bountiful future in responsible marine aquarium retailing.



## DID YOU KNOW???

A piece of plastic snipped from a 2 liter soda bottle works nicely as a temporary barrier when wedged between 2 corals that have grown to close to each other. This temporary fix works well until the reefkeeper has time to trim or move the animals.

## The pH Cycle of Reefs

By Randolph Goodlett

If one were to take a sample of books and look up what the pH level should be for our marine aquaria, we would see that there are a variety of pH levels that are recommended for our aquaria. Almost all would fall within the levels of 8.1 to 8.5 and all of these would appear to be appropriate for our organisms and our aquariums. But how many of those books talk about the cyclic nature of pH on real reefs? Not many, I would dare to say. It seems that a lot of our aquaria book authors like to survey previous books before issuing their advice on how to maintain things such as water quality in our tanks. Sounds reasonable enough. But there is the occasional misinformation that also seems to get passed along from book to book, and that is something that we do need to correct. For instance, if a young student were to sign a few aquarium books out of a public library to do a paper on real coral reefs, we in this industry could take some pride in that very notion. However, if this were a college student and he wanted to discuss pH on real reefs, he would find comments like "marine reefs have a pH of 8.2 to 8.4" or "marine reefs exhibit a pH of 8.5" and so on and so forth. If his professor is sharp, he might want to correct the paper on that issue. It is a rare book that will actually get into the fact that the pH on real coral reefs cycles up and down every day. At dawn, the pH in reef waters is at it's low point, at about 8.0 to 8.1. As the sun comes up and the plants on the reefs begin the light phase of photosynthesis, oxygen begins to be produced and carbon dioxide begins to be consumed. The brighter the sun gets, the faster this process goes and the more oxygen is produced. Although oxygen does not have any effect on the saltwater's pH, the amount of carbon dioxide in the water directly effects the pH level of the seawater. As carbon dioxide is absorbed by the plants on the reef and in the phytoplankton in the water in daylight, the pH goes up. This continues for as long as there is sunlight hitting the reef. At dusk, this effect slows to a halt, the pH levels off at about 8.5 to 8.6 and then, as darkness envelopes the reef, the photosynthesis process is reversed in the dark phase. Carbon dioxide begins to be produced and oxygen begins to be consumed by the plants. The pH starts back down and ends up at the low point at dawn. I have always found this fascinating. Years ago, while working with a very large microcosm based on the Smithsonian's algal turf systems, we used to have students occasionally do pH tests on our microcosm every hour over a 24 hour period. Interestingly enough, our sequential light schedule (lights coming on one at a time from dawn to noon and then going out one at a time from noon to dusk) and our algal scrubber filtration system yielded a cyclic pH that almost perfectly mimicked that of a variety of Caribbean reefs. We also tested several bacterial filter based reef and fish tanks and found a pH that was steady and actually slowly declining

(depending on the organic load). So there you have it. pH on real reefs actually does cycle up and down depending on what time of day or night you are talking about. This probably does have some affect on the actual lives of organisms like live corals and such, but as to how, this is an area that needs further investigation. It is also something to consider (especially the sequential lighting aspect) when designing good reef aquarium systems.

## GET ACTIVE!

These are the things that AMDA members should be taking part in this quarter.

- ◆ **Join the AMDA Board of Directors! The position of North Central Regional Director is open and needs to be filled. Please see page 3 for more information.**
- ◆ **Make sure you take advantage of your membership discounts by using the AMDA Purchasing Power Coupons!**
- ◆ **Check out the new and improved AMDA website at [www.amdareef.com](http://www.amdareef.com). Make sure you read the minutes of each bi-monthly board meeting so you can see the progress AMDA is making!**
- ◆ **Plan on attending MACNA! See page 2 for more information.**
- ◆ **If you have any submissions for the newsletter, they would be greatly appreciated. We need articles for the regular features, businesses to offer discount coupons, and anything else you would like to share with the membership! Please send submissions to:**

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