

Clearwater Marine Aquarium to Announce Campaign for Gold Star Kids

CMA to honor brain cancer survivor who donates thousands of stuffed animals

Clearwater, FL (Dec. 18, 2017) – On Tues., Dec. 19, Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) will announce its **Winter and Autumn's Hope** campaign: Through Jan. 13 (Make Your Dreams Come True Day) and at other times throughout the year, for every Winter plush sold, CMA will donate a Winter plush to a child who lost a parent serving in the U.S. military.

CMA was inspired by Autumn Swank, a young lady battling major health issues, who has collected thousands of stuffed animals for children in need. Media are invited to experience Autumn's special Wounded Warriors, Gold Star and first responder line-up welcome at 10:45 a.m. at Clearwater Marine Aquarium. CMA will kick-off its campaign and Autumn will meet her inspirations; Winter and Hope the rescued dolphins. At the event, CMA will present Autumn with 250 Winter plush, as well as other donated stuffed animals. CMA also encourages people to send in any new stuffed animal they would like to donate. All donations will be sent to the December 2018 Snowball Express event in Dallas to be distributed to Gold Star kids.

In 2009 Autumn was diagnosed with an inoperable brain stem tumor. She has spent the past eight years fighting for her life. Now in remission, she still deals with stomach issues, and relies on a wheelchair, a ventilator and a permanent tracheotomy. Throughout her health struggles, she has remained selfless and has collected thousands of stuffed animals to children in need, the majority being to children of fallen soldiers attending Gold Star's Snowball Express event.

Her donations started when she was first hospitalized and placed down the hall from an orphaned child without a family. After receiving many gifts from her visitors and seeing the boy had nothing – Autumn brought him one of her stuffed animals. The smile on the boy's face sparked Autumn's passion for bringing hope and joy to children in need. For Autumn's 18th birthday she is being surprised with a trip from her home in Texas to visit the dolphins who have inspired her throughout her difficult journey: Winter and Hope at Clearwater Marine Aquarium. Media invited to attend.

Additional Details:

- Where: 249 Windward Passage, Clearwater, FL 33767
- When: Lineup begins Tuesday, Dec. 19 at 10:45 a.m. Media advised to arrive no later than 10:30 a.m.
- Photos and video available upon request.

For further information, contact Julia Anderson at janderson@cmaaquarium.org or 727-686-3499.

About Clearwater Marine Aquarium:

Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working marine rescue center dedicated to inspiring the human spirit through leadership in education, research, rescue, rehabilitation and release. CMA is home to rescued dolphins, sea turtles, river otters, stingrays, nurse sharks and more. Winter the dolphin's story of survival, after an injury that caused her to lose her tail, has impacted millions of people around the world. A major motion picture, *Dolphin Tale*, highlighted her life story in 2011. The sequel, *Dolphin Tale 2*, was released in September 2014 and features the incredible story of Hope, a young resident dolphin of CMA. The mission and potential to change people's lives differentiates Clearwater Marine Aquarium from any other aquarium in the world.

WE BELIEVE in preserving our environment while inspiring the human spirit through leadership in the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of marine life, environmental education, research and conservation.

249 Windward Passage | Clearwater, FL 33767 | 727.441.1790 | SeeWinter.com

A Florida non-profit 501(c)(3)