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An aquarium adventure

On the unseasonably mild morning of Presidents Day, almost 200 students, family members, and staff from Community Learning Center (CLC), an adult literacy program based in North Philadelphia, voyaged from Kensington to the spectacular Adventure Aquarium in Camden. CLC students merged with the great streams of people and "schools" of students and navigated their way through the aquarium. Students viewed an array of marine life—from brilliantly colored tropical fish to graceful gray and white stingrays to green moray eels hiding in coral and translucent seahorses racing around the far turn of the seaweeds. Students also saw spiny crabs resting among rocks, eerie jellyfish undulating in dark water, and even a dwarf "caiman," a tropical crocodile.

Students were awed by more than 20 formidable sharks and 850 other creatures in the 550,000-gallon Shark Realm and 40-foot shark tunnel. Under the watchful eyes of an aquarium staff member, children leaned over to touch with two fingers small dogfish sharks, Indo-Pacific brown-banded sharks, and white-spotted bamboo sharks circling in the shallow touch tank.

A highlight of the day's adventure was the West African River exhibit, where students met two enormous Nile hippos, Genny and Button, as well as an African porcupine, as exotic birds flew about.

Walking outside, students and their families were amused by penguins and entertained by seals playing in the cold water and sunning on a warm rock.

Immersed in the aquarium experience, the CLC group learned fascinating facts about fish and marine animals. Student Judi Cabrera remarked that the sea has many different types of fish that she had never seen before. Several students commented that they learned that male seahorses can have babies and that penguins shed layers and can jump twice their height.

Everyone was delighted by the day at the Adventure Aquarium. At the conclusion of the visit, CLC students' children received new books about the oceans and water life. This trip is just one of the fabulous outings and special events that CLC sponsors each year. Community Learning Center's mission is to help adults develop literacy, math, and life skills using a supportive and holistic approach, so that they can realize their fullest potential at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Founded in 1987 with just 67 adult learners, Community Learning Center now enrolls 300 annually in its free Adult Basic Education, General Educational Development Preparation (GED), and English for Speakers of Languages (ESOL) classes. CLC also participates in Pennsylvania's Move Up initiative, providing instruction to equip Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients to find and maintain employment, and hence to achieve financial independence. In addition, Community Learning Center serves as a Community Outreach Center for Pennsylvania CareerLink, helping adults in the local community search for jobs, create a resume, assess skills and interests, and learn about the job market, training programs, job fairs, and other events and services. For more information about CLC, visit www.communitylearningcenter.org, or contact Carol S. Miller, associate director, at 215.426.7940 or cmiller@communitylearningcenter.org.



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