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Long Beach Aquarium's Renovated Theater Set For Digital 3-D Films

By Natasha Emmons

Long Beach (Calif.) Aquarium is in the process of getting a retrofit on its existing theater so digital 3-D films may be shown.

The theater will reopen to the public Memorial Day weekend showing a customized version of nWave Pictures' "Pandavision," a 3-D animated film depicting the destruction of the Earth's various biospheres.

The retrofit and film license and changes (which are being don by nWave) comes to about \$200,000. "We're using the same footage, but putting it together in a different way," said Cecile Fisher, director of communications and marketing for the Long Beach Aquarium. "We're creating a beginning and an end that will put everything you see in context."

The film will run indefinitely, Fisher said. "Now we have the technology, and at some point in the next year or so we'll switch it out with another film, based on the demand," she said.

"Various members of our management team have been looking at a variety of 3-D films and we felt this fit best for our aquarium. Obviously it's an amazing film in terms of getting people engaged.

We're using it as a tool to empower with the knowledge that these are important environmental issues."

The film stars various playful computer-generated animals – including a turtle, polar bears and monkeys – facing habitat destruction caused by pollution and destruction of humankind.

This is the first installation deal under the new partnership between Edwards Technologies Inc. and Panasonic. "When you think of an attraction of the themed entertainment world, when you start to look at the ability to show 3-D for these kind of dollars, it's unbelievable," said Cindy Aylward, manager of business development for Cinergy Inc., which works with ETI. "It's a fairly quick turn around, the price is really affordable and what they get out of it is an immersive theme park experience in a museum."

The technology we're putting in the theater is amazing. It allows us to show digital films and things that we weren't able to do in the past," Fisher said.

For the 3-D conversion that the aquarium is making, a new screen, projector and enhanced sound system will be added. A 4-D conversion is a little more complicated. The package offers in-theater effects including wind, fog, snow, confetti, and other interchangeable effects.