



# Save the Manatee Club

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## Adopt-A-Manatee®

### Meet A Member: Sylvia Wood & Pennsylvania 3rd Graders They experienced the realization of a dream



Sylvia Wood and Westfield Elementary Principal Tom Huzey hold a replica of the manatee stamp at the 1996 ceremony at Sea World of Florida. Also featured are Wood's original third grade class -- 7th graders at the time of the ceremony. (Photo by Nancy Sadusky, Save the Manatee Club.)

Ten years ago this week, teacher Sylvia Wood and her students from Westfield Elementary School in Pennsylvania, were able to experience the realization of a dream. On October 7, 1996, they gathered at Sea World of Florida for the unveiling of the Florida manatee stamp, one of 15 federal postage stamps in a new Endangered Species series.

But how did kids in Pennsylvania get concerned about manatees? "Two years before the stamp project began, a student had visited his grandparents in Florida, and he returned to school with a manatee adoption form," says Wood. "We were very concerned about the declining manatee population. I really felt that a manatee stamp could heighten awareness for this gentle giant; so I discussed the endeavor with the class of '92/'93. The rest, as they say, is history."

A youth stamp club advisor, Wood did some research to see if the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) had ever issued a manatee stamp and discovered the answer was no. Working with three consecutive third grade classes, Wood and her students wrote to people across the



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country and asked them to contact the USPS in support of a manatee stamp. Save the Manatee Club also featured Wood's request in the newsletter, and many SMC members wrote in support of the manatee stamp.

The manatee postage stamp.

"One part of this project was to prove that our nation as a whole wanted a manatee postage stamp," says Wood. "Each time a magazine would print an article about our project, we would receive a flood of letters asking what they could do to help further the cause. At times, the project became so overwhelming that some of our PTO members pitched in to help us keep our heads above water. We pinned flags on the map so we would know what states were already involved; this allowed us to focus on the remaining states. Responses were received from artists, politicians, concerned citizens, CEO's, but most of our responses came from CHILDREN! Two young girls even responded from Bahrain."

When they were informed that the U.S. Post Office had decided to issue an Endangered Species series and include the manatee, Wood and her students were ecstatic, and several area postmasters arrived at the school to share the great news. In addition to the manatee, 14 other species were chosen for the sheet of stamps. "At a ceremony at the National Geographic Headquarters in Washington, D.C., we were informed that the Endangered Species stamps were issued in the shortest possible time frame of any requested stamp," she says.



The Endangered Species stamp series.

In addition to a visit to National Geographic, the USPS paid for travel expenses and admission fees to send Wood and her students on a tour that included the National Zoo, CNN, and Sea World, where the stamp ceremony took place. The students sold manatee t-shirts, manatee coasters that a local business donated, manatee mugs, and spaghetti dinner tickets to pay for their meals, and the Pennsylvania State Education Association paid for their admission to Disney World in Orlando.

"It was a once in a lifetime trip," says Wood. "The support for this stamp had been amazing. During this four-year period, locals really became familiar with the manatee. Community members, local businesses, parents, and the school family wanted to see this project become a reality. Local newspapers were constantly featuring this project and highlighting the work of the students."

Over the last 10 years, Wood and her third graders have not rested on their laurels. Each year since 1993, Wood and each of her third grade classes have faithfully adopted a manatee and have remained Save the Manatee Club members. They have come up with ideas for a manatee-related line of products, including a manatee toolbox, hair scrunchies, sunglasses, and bookmarks. And after transferring to teach third grade in Ekland, PA, Wood's students wrote, edited, and created their own manatee books. Two student representatives were even invited to go to Harrisburg and present the books to State Senator Connie Williams and State Representative Lita Indzel Cohen, who had been given a Catalyst Award by eight State Arts in Education



Partners.

And the manatee stamp project has served as a model for other exciting endeavors. "I worked with the lady who started the Spay/Neuter stamps," says Wood. "Also, the national Stamp Camp USA program, under the direction of Postmaster Cheryl Edgcomb, was able to spin off from the manatee project. We presented the first program in New Orleans at a National Postmasters' Convention and worked with students for a week helping them assemble their first stamp exhibits. It was a hit!"

Asked why she thinks people find manatees so compelling, Wood replies: "I think most individuals are concerned about their environment and the manatee is such an easy species to fall in love with. They're gentle and non-threatening." When asked recently why we should help protect manatees, her students' replies included the following:



The manatee stamp project served as a model for the Spay/Neuter stamps.



Sylvia Wood and her current 3rd grade class at Clark Wood Elementary in Elkland, PA: Still in love with manatees after all these years. (Photo by Diane Heitzenrater, Clark Wood Elementary School)

"We should protect them because they are threatened."

"I really think we should help because a whole lot of them are getting hit by motorboats."

"We need to protect manatees so the numbers don't go down."

"It's our job to protect them so they don't go extinct. The manatees will be lost forever."

"Sea World and Save the Manatee Club do a wonderful job explaining the threats a manatee faces on a daily basis," says Wood. "Many people have visited a manatee viewing area and have witnessed firsthand the scars on the bodies of these beautiful creatures. Hopefully the manatee stamp served a part in spreading the word about Florida's sea cows."





**Dana** is the adopted manatee of Sylvia Wood and her 3rd grade class at Clark Wood Elementary School in Elkland, PA. Dana winters at Blue Spring State Park in Orange City, FL. She was born in 1988 and is known to be very outgoing and playful.

- [Learn more about Dana and the other manatees available for adoption](#)
- [Adopt-A-Manatee Online](#)
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### Look Mom, I'm On the Web Site!

If you are an SMC member and want to be featured on the "Meet A Member" page of our web site and in our e-newsletter, please send us a photo and tell us something about you, what you like about manatees, who your adopted manatee is, and why you became a member of Save the Manatee Club. Send an e-mail to [education@savethemanatee.org](mailto:education@savethemanatee.org). If we feature you at the web site, you'll receive a manatee-related gift.



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