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WildCare Names John Carlstroem as Executive Director, Celebrates Completion of New Wildlife Hospital and Education Center

Veteran environmental education leader and former WildCare board member will transition the organization into its new Wildlife Hospital and Education Center.

San Rafael, CA, [September 29, 2026] - WildCare, a beloved San Francisco Bay Area's wildlife organization, today announced that it has selected John Carlstroem as its next Executive Director. Carlstroem, a nonprofit and education executive with more than 35 years of experience leading environmental education organizations and schools, will assume the role on November 2, 2026. John follows in the footsteps of Ellyn Weisel's transformative leadership. She will conclude her tenure following the opening of WildCare's new Wildlife Hospital and Education Center in Albert Park.

"After a thorough national search, we are thrilled to welcome John to lead WildCare," said Veronica Geczi, WildCare Board President. "John brings a combination of executive nonprofit leadership, deep expertise in environmental education, and a lifelong love of wildlife. He also knows and cares about WildCare. As we open our new home and pursue our vision of becoming a nationally recognized wildlife institute, John is exactly the leader to carry that work forward, while sustaining and nurturing the heart of our beloved organization."

A Leader Rooted in Environmental Education

Carlstroem has spent his career at the intersection of nature, education, and nonprofit leadership. He served as Director of Education and Outreach and later Executive Director of the Headlands Institute in the Marin

Headlands, and as Executive Vice President of Yosemite National Institute, now known as NatureBridge, which connects students with transformative experiences in America's national parks.

He went on to lead in independent education for more than two decades, including 19 years as Head of School at Black Pine Circle School in Berkeley, and previously as Assistant Head of School at the Hamlin School in San Francisco. Most recently, he has served as Head of School at Montessori of Maui. He has consulted with the National Park Service, East Bay Regional Parks, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and the San Francisco Education Fund on teacher training, curriculum design, and management in the environmental and education sectors.

A committed civic and conservation leader, Carlstroem has served as Board Chair of Save The Bay, as well as on the boards of WildCare, the Bay Area Teacher Training Institute, and the Biodiversity Council. Before his leadership career, he worked professionally as a whale biologist and naturalist in California, Alaska, Hawaii, and Mexico. He holds a B.A. in Marine Biology from the University of California, Santa Cruz, studied nonprofit administration at the University of San Francisco, and earned a Doctorate in Education from Northeastern University.

“WildCare holds a special place in my heart, and it is an honor to be chosen to lead it at such an extraordinary moment,” said Carlstroem. “Ellyn, the staff, and this board have built a remarkable new world-class facility, cultivated a passionate and skilled team, and nurtured a community that truly shows up for wildlife and teaches the next generation of environmental stewards. I’m eager to build on that foundation, deepen our education and advocacy work, and ensure that every animal and every learner who comes through our doors is served with excellence.”

About the Search

WildCare partnered with Potrero Group, a nonprofit consulting firm that supports innovative leaders and organizations through strategic planning, facilitation, organizational development, and board and executive search services, to conduct the national search.

“WildCare's Search Committee ran a thoughtful, inclusive process, and the tremendous response from applicants across the country reflected how much this organization means to people,” said Jena Kuznik, Senior Consultant at Potrero Group, who led the search. “John stood out for his executive leadership, his decades of work connecting people to the natural world, and his genuine care for WildCare's mission and team. WildCare is in good hands under his leadership.”

Celebrating Ellyn Weisel's Legacy

The announcement comes as WildCare celebrates Ellyn Weisel, who joined in 2016 as Director of Development and became Executive Director in 2019, steadying the organization during a period of

transition. Under her leadership, WildCare more than doubled its operating budget, earned a perfect four-star Charity Navigator rating, invested significantly in staff compensation, and established its first-ever reserve fund. Her signature achievement, the $24+ million Elevate WildCare campaign, made the new Wildlife Hospital and Education Center possible. She will lead WildCare through the November ribbon-cutting and work alongside Carlstroem to ensure a seamless transition.

“Leading the campaign alongside this incredible team and watching the new facility take shape has been the joy of my career,” said Weisel. “Our entire community has come together to make this project possible and ensure WildCare will be here for generations to come. I am so very grateful.”

New Wildlife Hospital and Education Center

The WildCare community will have the opportunity to welcome Carlstroem at the facility's Grand Opening on Dec 14th.

The new Wildlife Hospital and Education Center marks WildCare’s return to its longtime home at 76 Albert Park Lane in San Rafael. The new, state of the art facility is roughly four times the size of the facility it replaces. The three-story hospital includes dedicated spaces for surgery, radiology, and quarantine, separate housing for predator and prey species, and rooftop aviaries where recovering birds can heal in the sun. Throughout the two plus years of permitting and construction, WildCare has continued caring for animals and delivering their education programs without interruption at an interim location.

At the center of the campus stands a restored 1879 Carpenter Gothic building, originally the parish hall of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, which moved to Albert Park Lane in 1953 to house the Junior Museum of Marin and later became the foundation of WildCare. Relocated and renovated during construction, the building is now home to expanded education spaces and a new ambassador courtyard. Together, these spaces will allow WildCare to treat more animals, reach more learners, and serve as a regional hub for wildlife medicine and nature education.

About WildCare

Founded by naturalist Elizabeth Terwilliger more than 50 years ago, WildCare is a wildlife hospital and nature education nonprofit based in San Rafael, Calif. Each year, WildCare's medical team treats approximately 3,500 injured and orphaned wild animals, its nature education programs reach more than 13,000 people, and its Living with Wildlife Hotline answers approximately 12,000 calls. Learn more at discoverwildcare.org.

WildCare is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. EIN 51-0172331

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