



**Mary Stella**  
**Director of Media & Marketing, Dolphin Research Center**

Mary Stella, Director of Media & Marketing for the Dolphin Research Center, shares the story of her success:

**How many years have you been in the tourism industry?**

I have been in the industry for 13 years now. Since its founding in 1984, I experienced the Dolphin Research Center (DRC) as a visitor, member, and then a volunteer. In 2001, I knew that I wanted to be part of the staff family.

**How did you start your career in Tourism with the Dolphin Research Center?**

I moved from NJ to the Florida Keys to take a job in Volunteer Resources at the DRC. Four months later, I transferred to Media & Marketing. I knew DRC was important in the field of marine mammal care, education and research, but after joining them, I understood the vital role that DRC has in tourism in the Florida Keys.

**What defining moment led you to your current point in your career?**

At DRC, we educate visitors about marine mammals and the environment. The connection we foster between them and the dolphins and sea lions in our family inspires their conservation efforts on behalf of these animals and the oceans.

**How has does that inspire you to continue growing at the DRC?**

Being part of DRC involves me in something with global significance. That inspires me every day. Our efforts also draw people to the Florida Keys. Knowing that we positively impact our islands is another strong motivator.

**What was a teachable moment for you that impacted your success?**

I believe in "Leap and the net will appear." Moving to the Keys – landing exactly where I was meant to be – reinforced dreaming big and going for it. We're a nonprofit facility, so our marketing budget isn't huge. We use that "go for it" approach with out-of-the-box thinking which paid off.

**Can you give us an example of an out-of-the-box marketing initiative?**

We made a cute video of dolphins and sea lions doing behaviors to a morning news programs' theme song. We sent the video and ended up with several minutes of national television exposure.

**Who were the people that influenced your career?**

Our DRC leadership and my co-workers inspire me every day. We have a united passion for our mission and we are completely committed to it. This influences and inspires me every single day. I have to say that it's not just people, but also the dolphins and sea lions. Knowing and appreciating them as individuals has made a huge difference in my life.

**What excites you most about your job?**

Every day presents opportunities to make a difference in the world. Whether it's in the care of animals, rescuing an endangered species, discovering something new about them through our research, teaching visitors of all ages and seeing their joy, or offering programs to wounded warriors, we are sharing our passion and dreams. It's a great way to live your life, for sure. It never hurts that I get to play with dolphins, too.

**If you were not in hospitality, what do you imagine you would be doing?**

At this stage of my life, if I didn't like what I do so much, I'd retire, travel around and be a tourist myself!

**What advice would you give to someone considering a career in tourism?**

There are so many different areas within tourism. Look for the area where your skills not only fit, but where your heart and spirit will be engaged and uplifted. Life is too short to not do work that you truly love.

**We can see that you are passionate about your career at the DRC, but tell us something unique or interesting about your life outside of your job.**

I'm an avid boater. A few years ago I bought a boat, and I love that I am a capable captain. One of my favorite things to do on a weekend is get some friends together on the boat and go snorkeling. There are many great spots to snorkel the reef!