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## Save the Harbors longtime chief reflects on 18 years of advocacy

Patty Foley, president and CEO of Save the Harbor / Save the Bay, has stepped down from the helm of the nonprofit harbor-advocacy organization she has led since 2000. Under her leadership, membership grew from 500 to more than 5,000, and the budget has increased almost tenfold. Save the Harbor's free environmental-education programs for young people have connected nearly 250,000 underserved youth to the Boston Harbor since 2002. She and her husband, Bruce Berman, who is the organization's head of strategy and communication, split their time between Brighton and a boat in the Charlestown Marina, depending on the weather. Foley recently spoke with Business Journal correspondent Jim Morrison on the changes in the harbor over the past 18 years.

### Did you have a strong connection to Boston Harbor before you took this job?

I was born in South Boston and learned to swim at what is not the Curley Rec Center. We lived at E and 6th, so I grew up absolutely loving the beach in the late '50s and into the '60s. When I was considered to lead Save the Harbor/Save the Bay in 1999, I was incredibly excited. The organization was at a crossroads. The question was, now that the harbor is fairly clean, do we declare victory and start thinking about a sunset strategy or keep going with the next phase of our work? At that point, I was retained to lead a strategic-planning process. It was quite clear that the board and other stakeholders wanted to figure out ways for us to share the harbor with more people. This collection of the harbor, islands and the public beaches are among the most stunning natural resources in the country. The public paid \$5 billion to clean it up, so we thought we should share the resource and protect the people's investment through programs and strategies to connect all the waterfront and beachfront communities in the region to the harbor, islands and beaches.

### How does it feel to see the Harbor so vibrant today?

It is one of the most amazing success stories for the city and the commonwealth. It has been heralded as one of the greatest environmental success stories in the country. At the time the court ordered the state to clean the harbor in 1986, 250 million gallons of raw sewage was being dumped into Boston Harbor every day. For me, the job was about finishing the cleanup and making sure there was adequate funding to monitor the 30,000 youth and their families to Boston Harbor and the islands and the

beaches for free. We and others were able to convince the MWRA and other city and state policymakers that it was unacceptable for the Boston beaches to be closed for one or two out of every five days because of stormwater contamination. It was a six - or seven - year effort.

### What has the economic impact of the cleanup been?

This city understands and appreciates that clean water is good for the civic health and vitality. It's a great recreational resource, and it strengthens the region's economy. Prior to my arrival, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay was at the table when Chapter 91 was created, which required certain contributions to the neighborhood and the city for the privilege of developing along the water's edge. It's been great for the economy at all price points and has been a contributor to a broad array of improvements across the city and region. Look at all the new restaurants and condos up and down the coastline. For example, what's exciting about 150 Seaport...is that they are going to do a wraparound Harborwalk that is going to be 24 feet wide or so, which is twice the minimum required. It's good for everyone. It welcomes the public, diners can enjoy outdoor dining and everyone gets to be on the harbor.

### Is it hard to leave the organization?

I'm incredibly wistful, but it's been a great time. The organization by every measure is strong and has a great future. I'm going to take it easy for a couple of months, but I'm still going to contribute to our city in some form. Bruce will stay on. He's one of the original founders. We met in 1984, during John Kerry's first senate campaign.

**Fast Facts:**  
**Year Save the Harbor was founded:** 1986  
**Total revenue in 2017:** \$1.35 million  
**Total expenses in 2017:** \$1.32  
**Percentage of expenses that went to programs in 2017:** 81.2%



We didn't know each other. I was finance director, in charge of raising \$3 million. Bruce was overseeing design and creative, and setting up the computer system. We worked together. We worked together. After John was elected, I moved to Washington, D.C., for a couple of years to be his deputy administrative assistant. When I moved home, I ran into Bruce on the street, and the next thing I knew we started dating. We've been married nearly 20 years.

### If you could wave a magic wand, what would you do on your way out?

Leave the organization in even stronger financial shape. The board has established a legacy fund in my honor, so we're raising money for the organization's future. Revenue is the baseline from which we are able to build successful, sustainable programming as well as continue our advocacy and monitoring. I'd want us to be able to accelerate our efforts to share the harbor with the region's youth and families. We want to advocate and continue to look for opportunities to increase support for the programming.