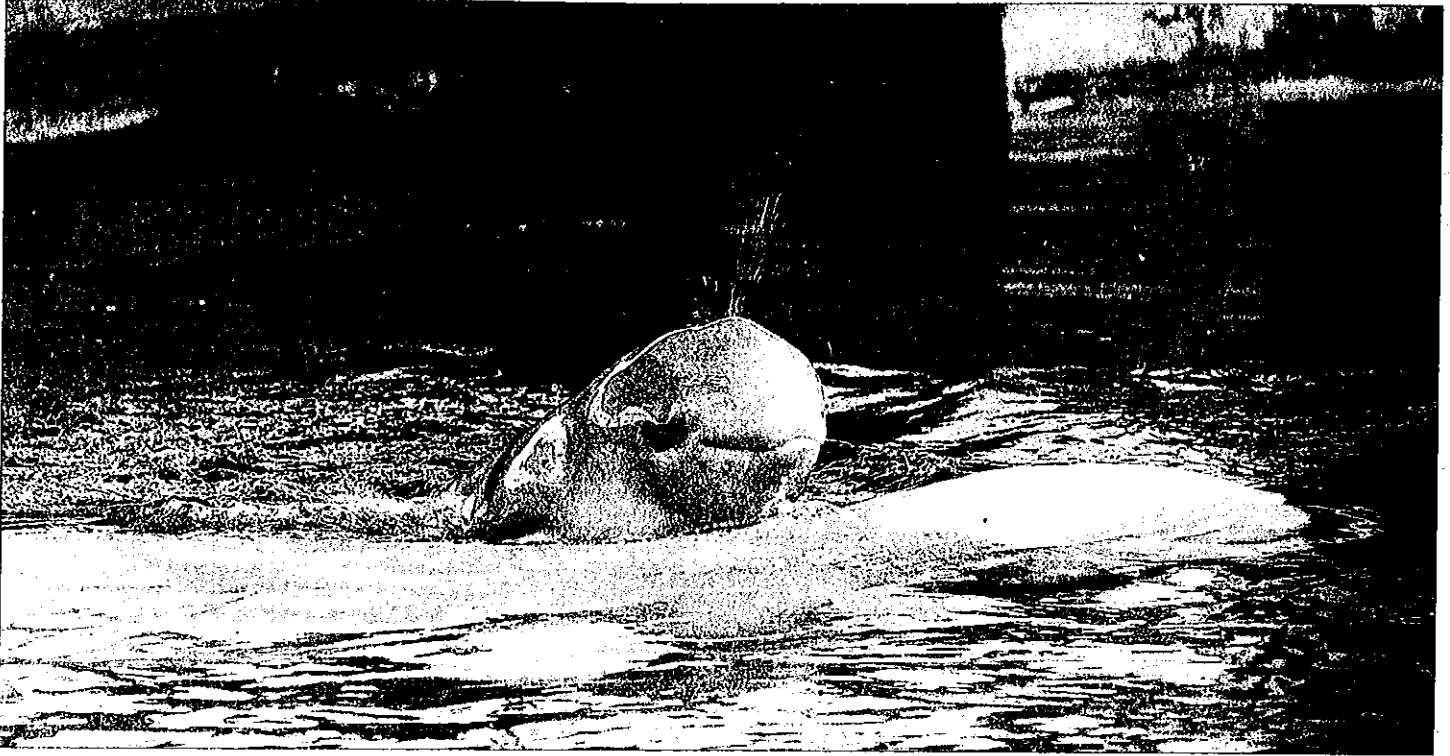


# Chicago Tribune

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Shedd Aquarium photo by Brenna Hernandez

The newest member of the Shedd Aquarium beluga whale family, a 125-pound male, debuts for the cameras Tuesday. Mom is the 20-year-old Puuji.

## The Shedd has whale of a delivery

By John McCormick  
Tribune staff reporter

The Shedd Aquarium proudly announced the birth of its latest family member Tuesday, a male beluga whale weighing about 125 pounds and measuring 5 feet 5 inches long.

The calf, which will remain unnamed for several weeks, swam to the surface shortly after his arrival around 6 p.m. Monday, before taking his first breath and bonding with his mother, Puuji. Aquarium offi-

cials said mother and baby were doing fine after the 6½-hour delivery.

The pair will remain out of public sight for at least a month as they work through milestones such as nursing and independent feeding. Shedd's staff will monitor them around the clock for several months, a period when survival is always tenuous.

The 20-year-old Puuji (pronounced poo-EE-jee) came to Shedd in 1989, but she has given birth there only once before. Her first delivery ended

tragically in 1999 when the calf, also a male, died a month after birth following nursing problems and a respiratory ailment.

One of nine North American aquariums and zoos that keep and breed belugas, the Shedd has seen its share of controversy among some activists since the animals were first brought there in 1989.

Although it has had two successful whale births—Kayavak and Qannik—the first two baby belugas born there, in 1998 and 1999, died.

This time, the calf is already showing healthy nursing and other positive signs, according to Ken Ramirez, the aquarium's vice president of animal programs and training. Still, Ramirez said a beluga calf's well-being during the early stages of life is fragile under any circumstances, captive or wild.

"They are born with no immune system," he said. "Their immunity from all the things in the world comes from mother's milk."

Like the Shedd's six other

belugas, the new calf is expected to get an Inuit name to create a connection with the Canadian region where the animals come from. In the past, the aquarium has solicited public input, but Ramirez said it is unclear whether that will be done this time.

The father, Naluark, was reintroduced in January 2004 to Puuji and Shedd's other belugas after returning from a loan program at the Mystic Aquarium in Connecticut.

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