Family-friendly, fright-free ZooBoo was a hit with young families

Como Friends Profile: Peter Everett

Making the Case: Advocacy efforts have become a growing part of Como Friends’ mission

A partnership with the Autism Society of Minnesota gives kids fresh skills in conservation and conversation

Learn how Como Zoo welcomed a 5 foot 8 inch newborn

Zoo Baby: Rosie the Giraffe

Gifts that celebrate The Ordway Garden’s first winter season

Como Friends is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to inspire community generosity to advance Como Park Zoo and Conservatory as a destination where people from all walks of life can gather, learn and enjoy the natural world.

President: Jackie Sticha
Board Members: Diana Allen, Sheila Brown, Arta Cheney, Jennifer Denys, Scott Dongnoko, Peter Everett, Michelle Furrer, Anne Hazeloath Field, Laura Fries, David Gabel, Tom Hodnefield, Robert Hoke, Jennifer Huelsmann

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Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things.

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is accredited by the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (APGA) serves and strengthens public gardens throughout North America by supporting and promoting their work, value and achievements in horticultural display, education, research and plant conservation.

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Inside this issue

Como News and Events

Advocating for Como

Education Partners

Zoo Baby: Rosie the Giraffe

Garden Safari Gifts
Costumed for Como: 
Families Enjoy ZooBoo Updates

Thanks to the more than 15,000 ticket-buying trick or treaters who helped raise more than $60,000 to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory at ZooBoo in October.

“This year, we were really pleased to hear how much our families like the changes we’ve made to ZooBoo over the last few years, with more interactive stations that encourage kids to move and play, not to mention the Cider and Coffee House which gives parents and grandparents a nice place to take a break,” says Caroline Mehlhop, Como Friends’ Director of Sponsorships and Events. “Our zookeepers and education staff also did a great job of introducing our ZooBoo visitors to the animal ambassadors that stopped by in the Visitor Center.”

Collecting donations for ZooBoo treat bags is a year-round effort at Como Friends. Call Caroline at 651-487-8235 if your business or workplace has healthy treats or child-friendly toys you’d like to contribute to the cause.

Join Como Friends for a Members-Only Preview of the Winter Carnival Orchid Show

Say goodbye to King Boreas and feel the heat of the tropics at the Winter Carnival Orchid Show January 25th and 26th at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory. The show, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this month, is the region’s largest display of privately held orchids owned by members of the Minnesota Orchid Society. Planning to pick the best and brightest bloomers among Como’s 1,800-plant collection of orchids begins more than six months in advance, as horticulturists look ahead to predict which plants will be in top form for the judges of the American Orchid Society.

Admission to the event is $5 per person, but if you’re a Como Friends member, join us for a special members-only preview on Sunday, January 26 at 9 a.m. Call 651.487.8229 to RSVP. Coffee and Donuts will be served. Bring your member card or join on-site!
Bouquets, Como Friends’ long-running wine, beer and food benefit, won’t be returning in December 2014—but it will come back into bloom a few months later in February 2015.

“Just like the plants in the Conservatory, we decided that after nearly a decade of scheduling Bouquets in December it was time to ‘repot’ the event into late winter,” says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. Though the popular wine-tasting fundraiser typically sells out, a recent survey of supporters found that a majority of Como Friends’ guests would prefer to come to the event in February, as a chance to unwind after the busy holiday season. The new schedule will also allow guests to glimpse the colorful Winter Flower Show in the Sunken Garden, which runs this year through March 16.

Watch your mailbox and Como Promo, our e-newsletter, for more about Bouquets and other benefits to support Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. And thanks to the sold-out crowd of 400 guests at the 2013 Bouquets who helped Como Friends raise more than $10,000 to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.
When Peter Everett and his wife, Katie Gates, lived in Paris, they made frequent trips to the Menagerie du Jardins des Plantes, the famous urban zoo founded in the wake of the French Revolution. “It was in the center of the city, so you could just take a short metro ride and have access to this fun and fascinating place,” says Everett, who saw the same qualities at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory when his family returned to the Twin Cities, where Everett serves as a marketing director at General Mills. Now one of the 24 members of Como Friends’ board of directors, Everett recently talked to Como Insider about why he and his family choose to support Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

What do you like most, the Zoo or Conservatory? We’ve really enjoyed the events we’ve been to at the Conservatory, like the opening of The Ordway Gardens and the Bouquets winetasting fundraiser. But we have a five-year-old daughter, Marit, and a two-year-old son, Thomas, so we’re most definitely zoo visitors.

Young families are Como’s favorite demographic. As a father, what do you think makes Como Zoo so compelling to kids? It’s the ability to see and be close to animals that you might never otherwise get to see. My little guy loves Gorilla Forest and just being that close to the orangutans and the saki monkeys is a great experience for him. And at a member event, my daughter got a chance to feed a giraffe. I think that’s a memory she’ll have for long time. As a parent, I have to say one of the things I really like about Como is its scale, and that from a kid’s perspective, you don’t have to cover too much distance to see some really amazing things.

You live in the west metro. How on earth did you find your way to St. Paul? Your question makes me laugh, because I think people forget that Como Zoo is actually an easier drive from the west metro than going to the Minnesota Zoo, which we also support. I think that’s why there are so many visitors from Minneapolis, Edina, and St. Louis Park, because it’s so easy to get to and enjoy with small children, who may have a short attention span. That was one of the things we shared with legislators last year at the capitol, is just how popular Como is with families from across the metro area. People think of it as a St. Paul destination, but it’s really a statewide resource.

Making the case for Como with Minnesota lawmakers has become a part of the mission at Como Friends, where the board recently adopted advocacy efforts as part of a new strategic plan. Why is advocating for Como important? The core of Como Friends is about a public-private partnership, and we have a stronger effect when we’re all working together. With private contributions, Como Friends has funded some great capital improvements, while a lot of the ongoing daily costs are funded on the public side, and I think that’s a really cool model for a cultural institution. Public funding for improvements like Gorilla Forest is also really critical, but we’re also competing with lots of other priorities at a statewide level. That’s why we want people to understand that Como is the number one cultural institution in the state, and that two million people come through here every year, so they understand what a treasure it is. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, I suppose, and if we don’t tell that story, we’re not going to get the support Como deserves.

Como is free every day of the year, so why do you tell people it’s worth becoming a member? To me it feels like a really natural way to support the community. When you see the buses full of kids come in, and you think of the number of people touched by Como for the amount of money it costs to run it, it’s just incredibly efficient. Also, from a selfish standpoint, when you’re a member, you get invited to some great events and behind-the-scenes opportunities that don’t happen anywhere else. For my family, those have been really memorable experiences.
Advocating for public support of Como Zoo and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has become a growing part of Como Friends’ mission.

Six months after moving into Gorilla Forest, Como Zoo’s seven western lowland gorillas look very much at home in their sprawling new exhibit, climbing up the grassy incline and basking on the heated rocks during the late autumn.

“I just love seeing how comfortable and content these gorillas have been in their new home,” says Como Friends president Jackie Sticha. “Especially because there was a time when we worried this improvement would never get built.”

Creating a larger and more naturalistic habitat for Como Zoo’s western lowland gorillas had been on Como’s “to do” list for more than a decade when the 2010 Minnesota State Legislature approved $11 million in bonding to build the exhibit. But six months later, when the 2011 session opened, the primate project was in jeopardy again as several lawmakers threatened to rescind the funds intended for improvements at Como.

“We saw Gorilla Forest as such a critical improvement at Como and for our community that we swung into action to save it when funding was threatened,” says Sticha, who mobilized a handful of board members and Como Friends members from around the state of Minnesota to call their legislators and express their support for building Gorilla Forest. “Almost everyone we met with made it clear that they cared about Como, but some legislators saw it as a St. Paul institution,” says Sticha. “But when we talked to them about the fact that Como welcomes two million visitors free of charge and only sixteen percent are from St. Paul with field trips from schools in nearly every county, they started to see Como
as a statewide asset. The message got through."

The success of Como Friends’ grassroots gorilla campaign convinced the board of directors that making the case for Como at the capitol must be a growing part of the nonprofit’s mission, a plan the board formalized in a new strategic plan adopted in December 2012.

“Como Friends has been the driver behind a decade of improvements that have helped to transform Como into a statewide destination that has a great return on investment for the citizens of Minnesota,” says Pete Thrane, a Como Friends board member, and a shareholder at Stinson Leonard Street. “As we started our second decade as Como’s nonprofit partner, it became increasingly clear to us that Como Park Zoo and Conservatory needed strong advocates at the capitol. Most of the leading cultural institutions in the state have this kind of support, and when you consider that Como’s attendance beats them all, we recognized that advocacy at the state level is another effort we need in our arsenal to keep Como strong in its second century.”

Last year, Como Friends’ advocacy efforts helped to leverage additional support for Como through the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, boosting Legacy Amendment grants from $400,000 to $1 million over the next biennium. That additional $600,000 in funding will help to provide such popular programs as “Lil Explorers,”

Improving traffic circulation and easing congestion for Como Regional Park’s 4.4 million annual visitors is the goal of a transportation bonding request at the legislature this season.
Como’s free early childhood program, and the “Music Under Glass” and “Grovin’ in the Garden” concert series in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory. It will also help Como’s education department develop and test a new “residency program” created at the request of area schools interested in using Como’s plants and animals as a starting point for multi-disciplinary learning right on Como’s campus.

During the upcoming legislative session, Como Friends will help make the case for two of Como’s top priorities—an improved seal and sea lion exhibit and a comprehensive transportation improvement plan to integrate transit and trail systems while easing traffic around Como Regional Park. “Como Friends does many things behind-the-scenes that help improve Como Park Zoo and Conservatory for our two million visitors, and advocacy is a growing part of that work,” says Sticha, adding that Como Friends and fans are always encouraged to share their love of Como with their own state representatives. “Our visitors help make the case for Como every year, but it’s always helpful for decision-makers to be reminded of how much Como matters to Minnesotans.”

A long tradition of live music and free concerts came back to life at Como thanks to funding from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Legacy Fund. Check Como’s website for a roster of this season’s performing artists.

If you see your legislator in your community, tell them you are a supporter of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory and ask them to support Como’s bonding projects.

Email us at comomembership@comofriends.org with “Advocate for Como” in the message line if you would like to help out during the legislative session by reaching out to your legislators.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for current news and events.

WHAT’S ON COMO’S AGENDA?

Sparky the Sea Lion: A Minnesota Tradition

After more than 50 years at Como Zoo, Sparky the Sea Lion and her pinniped pals are ready for a new and improved exhibit that meets anticipated new federal regulatory requirements for marine mammals. In 2014, Como is requesting $13.8 million in public bonding to expand the aquatics building and the amphitheater with pools and water features that will allow seals and sea lions to stay outdoors year-round.

Transportation Improvements for Como Park

The City of St. Paul was home to fewer than 150,000 residents when city planners began building Como just before the turn of the century. A century later, Como Regional Park now welcomes more than 4.4 million annual visitors—92 percent of whom arrive by personal vehicle.

Calming traffic, easing congestion, and improving livability for Como’s neighbors is the goal of an $8.9 million transportation improvement bonding request Como will take to the legislature this session. The plan was created with substantial community input, and is designed to improve roadways and intersections, integrate new transit and trail options, and accommodate large school groups and guests with limited mobility.
Research has long shown that spending time around animals can lower stress, build empathy, and improve bonds between family members and friends. Now a recent study from Australia’s University of Queensland has found that being in the company of animals can also significantly increase positive social behaviors in children who have an autism spectrum disorder.

Nora Slawik, Director of Education and Training at the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM), says she’s witnessed those connections first-hand thanks to a growing partnership with Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. “Fascination with animals is pretty common among students with autism, so learning more about them can be a great topic to focus on,” she says.

The partnership began last year, when AuSM approached Como’s Education Department about the possibility of creating a series of summer camps for kids on the autism spectrum that would combine opportunities to build social skills with the chance to learn more about conservation. “We work with a lot of different schools and home school groups to design curriculum that meets their needs, so this was really an extension of the work we do every day,” says Como education specialist Katie Baltgalvis. Working closely with the staff at AuSM, Baltgalvis designed a summer camp series that would bring kids behind the scenes to explore career ideas for working with plants and animals, while keeping in mind some of the special educational needs of kids with autism, who can, for instance, be sensitive to environments with loud noises or strange smells.

“It was wonderful working with Katie, who was very open to hearing our ideas and to meeting and talking through the idea of how do you incorporate social skills and learning with all of the great things the Zoo and Conservatory have to offer,” says Slawik. “Kids with autism can have difficulty making friends,” so an important aspect of the class, she says “is bringing kids together from across the metro area, and encouraging them to share their contact information,” so they can make connections with each other that can last long after their trip to Como.

The summer camp series was so successful that AuSM and Como combined forces again last fall to offer “ZooSkillz,” a series of social skills classes for elementary-age, tween, and teen students that now meet at Como nearly every Saturday through the school year. This fall, students focused on “The Power of Plants,” while the winter and spring sessions will explore “Tropical Rain Forets” and “Animals and Ecosystems.”

“We consider this a very innovative, creative class for kids who are high-functioning, and we’re finding that it highly exceeded their expectations, and gave them great skills and more self confidence,” says Slawik. In fact, the Como partnership has been so successful that AuSM is sharing it as a model for other educational institutions in the area, encouraging them to create similar classes for kids with autism spectrum disorders. “I would tell other school groups that if you’ve got an idea you think could work bring it to Como,” says Slawik. “They’re really the gold standard when it comes to being educational partners.”
A Calf is Born
Como Zoo hoofstock keeper Todd Maki talks about what it takes to welcome a six-foot baby to the African hoofstock barn

On September 1, Como Zoo welcomed its newest zoo baby—Rosie, a reticulated giraffe. Como Zoo keepers hadn’t been expecting a new arrival so soon, since the Zoo’s newest breeding male Skeeter is only four years old. But when Clover put on some weight last winter, keepers kept a close eye on the female who began showing signs she was ready to deliver a calf in late August. Como Insider talked to hoofstock keeper Todd Maki about what it takes to welcome a nearly 6-foot baby into the barn.

STEALTH PREGNANCEY: Though they have a 15-month gestation period, a pregnant giraffe doesn’t “show” until she’s nearly ready to deliver. “Giraffes hide things very well, and they have huge intestines to hold all the vegetation they eat, so their bellies are round all the time,” says Maki. A scale can be a more reliable predictor of pregnancy, but Clover doesn’t step on the scale, as do the other giraffes. He says, “The area around their tail will swell and contract about a month ahead. Then their udder swells anywhere from a week to a day or so before the calf comes.”

A SOFTER LANDING: Giraffes stand up while giving birth, which means calves fall to the ground from heights of six feet or more in the wild. “We don’t worry about them hitting a hard surface because they’re so flexible,” says Maki. “But we did prepare a birthing stall with a layer of sand so that the calf would have more traction under her feet to get her up and stable.”

BONDING TIME: Clover and Rosie spent their first 48 hours on their own, early bonding that helped ensure the calf was nursing successfully. On day three, keepers scooped Rosie up for a quick blood draw to make sure she got her fill of colostrum—the “first milk” mammals provide newborns, a protein-rich mixture of disease-preventing antibodies passed from mother to calf. “If
it’s not going well it can be a sign that keepers will have to bottle feed a calf, but with Clover and Rosie, they were off to a great start,” says Maki. Rosie’s first charted height and weight: 5 foot 8, 130 pounds.

ROSIE’S BIG DEBUT: At the end of her first week, Rosie was ready to meet her adoring public—but only if mom Clover was nearby. “Luckily, a calf just wants to follow her mom, so it doesn’t take any training to get Rosie to move where we want her to go,” says Maki. “Getting her outside also helps us to see that her joints are all formed properly and that she’s walking around, sturdy and strong.” Skeeter also got a chance to meet his first offspring, leaning over a wall to lick the calf for the first time.

EARLY TRAINING: Two decades ago, zookeepers doubted whether giraffes really responded to operant conditioning training, but patient trainers like Maki have proved it can be done. “Carnivores like canids and large cats are at the top of the food chain, and most are not very fearful,” says Maki, who spent a sabbatical in Namibia working with African animals. “But giraffes are prey animals so their first instinct is to make sure their environment is totally safe before they act on anything, and this can take time. Once you figure out what they need to feel comfortable, they respond.” One of Rosie’s first lessons will be learning her own name, so keepers greet her every time they encounter the calf.

GROWING FAST: During their first few months, giraffe calves grow an average of 7 to 9 inches every month—a pace that will taper down to two or three inches a month by the end of the year: “Rosie will double her height in a year, and has already gained about 100 pounds,” says Maki. “We haven’t been able to get her back on the scale, but I know I can’t pick her up now.”

Como Zoo’s hoofstock building will be getting a facelift in 2014 that will give visitors a chance to get even closer to Rosie and the other reticulated giraffes. The plans include a public feeding station and other interactive features designed to teach visitors even more about these gentle giants. You can help make this improvement possible with a contribution to Como Friends in the enclosed envelope. Just write “For Rosie and Friends” if you’d like your donation to support improvements to Como Zoo’s hoofstock building.
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If you receive more than one issue of the Como Insider, call our office at (651) 487-8229

Please Recycle

The Ordway Gardens
Winter Wonders
at Garden Safari Gifts

For the first time ever, Como visitors are enjoying a glimpse of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden at rest under a layer of white. At Garden Safari Gifts, we’re celebrating this winter wonder with Japanese Garden themed items that benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory all year long!

Como Friends Members receive a 15% discount!

Assorted Gemstone Holiday Trees $17.99
Granite Kodai Lanterns $349 - $574
Pewter Bonsai Keychain $7.99
Assorted Bonsai, three years and older $29.99 to $229.99