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.

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory’s mission is to inspire our public to value the presence of living things in our lives.

The Como Insider is a bimonthly newsletter that just opened at Como Zoo. It features art exhibits for schools, to the Blooming Butterflies garden, and the giraffe feeding station. Como Friends brings the community together to support the zoo and its mission. When you give to Como Friends, 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 is open every day of the year! Winter Hours (April 1 – September 30): 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. (October 1 – March 31): 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Travelers Sunset Affair has become one of the most important ways we connect our philanthropic community to the two million visitors Como welcomed last year. More than 1.2 million kids and adults came to Como during last year’s “high season” from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Here’s how to make the most of Minnesota’s favorite family get-away:

**Como News and Events Summer 2016**

**COMO CLOSES EARLY FOR TRAVELERS SUNSET AFFAIR**

On July 21, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory cuts visiting hours short by three hours — but it’s for a very good cause. At 3 p.m., Como will close to allow our team of volunteers to prepare for Travelers Sunset Affair: Sun-down on the Savanna, Como Friends’ biggest fundraiser of the year to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

The American Public Gardens Association (APGA) serves and strengthens public gardens throughout North America by supporting and promoting their work, values and achievements in horticultural display, education, research and plant conservation.

The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory looks gorgeous from every angle, but especially on Artist and Photographer Days, when visitors are allowed to set up easels and tripods before the public opening. Find the perfect spot for capturing Como at its finest between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. on July 24 and September 25 for $5 per person.

**COMO FRIENDS INSIDER**

Graphic Design: Matt Uhler
Editor: Laura Billings Coleman
The Como Insider is printed by Dolan Printing on recycled paper.
On Memorial Day, the seventh “Sparky the Sea Lion” made her debut with a conservation demonstration show that splashes down daily at 11:30 a.m. through Labor Day, with an additional show at 3 p.m. on weekends and holidays.

Known as “Subee” behind the scenes, this seven-year-old sea lion first came to Como in 2010 for rehabilitation following a shark attack. Highly attuned to positive reinforcement training, zookeepers quickly realized she had star potential, and have been grooming her to take the place of Como’s retiring Sparky “CC” for the last two years. “Her energy is unbelievable, and she likes to do things with a little extra flourish,” says Como Zoo senior keeper Allison Jungheim.

Como welcomed a record-setting audience to last year’s lighting, and has rearranged the event to accommodate even more food, more vendors, and more visitors. Explore the art, music, food, martial arts and cultural traditions of Japan at this family-friendly event, reminiscent of Japan’s annual Obon holiday, on August 21. Admission is $5 per adult, $3 for seniors and children ages 3-12, and free for children under the age of 2.

Bring your camera and capture a face-to-face encounter with one of Como Zoo’s gentle herd of giraffes at the new public feeding station at the African Hoofstock building. For $5 a person, you can try your hand at feeding one of them a crunchy leaf of romaine lettuce. Public demonstrations daily at 10:45 a.m. with an additional feeding weekends at 2:30 p.m.

Take advantage of the 10 percent tuition discount benefit for all Como Friends members and sign up for Como’s newest summer camp — Camp Conservation. In this hands-on camp created especially for middle-schoolers moving into 6th and 7th grades, kids connect with globe-trotting Como zookeepers and horticulturists, meet the species they are trying to save, and discover cool ways kids can help. For more great summer camp sessions, check out www.comozoo-conservatory.org.

The checkered flag has dropped at Como Town Driving School with this year’s addition of replica Formula One race cars. Climb into one of Como Town Driving School’s classic original cars, or rev up one of the new Italian-styled race cars, custom made in Sweden. Start your engines for miles and miles of family fun at Como Town this summer!
From its early roots at the turn of the 20th century, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory has introduced five generations of Minnesota children to the wonders of nature. Now we’re serving the sixth—a cohort of kids, teens and young adults that demographers often call “Generation Z.”

The first generation of “digital natives,” they’re also notable for their deep desire to do good. In fact, 26 percent of 16- to 19-year-olds currently volunteer, 60 percent want jobs that make a difference in the world, and 76 percent are concerned about humanity’s impact on the planet.

“The young people Como is serving today are part of the largest and most diverse generation in the country’s history, and their commitment to making the world a better place is really inspiring,” says Jackie Sticha, President of Como Friends, which helped to fund a new strategic plan for Como’s education department aimed, in part, at serving the special needs and interests of Generation Z. “With nearly a million school age visitors every year, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is in a unique position to teach the next generation of young visitors about the power that individuals have when it comes to supporting conservation, and we want to do right by them.”

A recent study conducted by PGAV Destinations found that respondents in Gen Z strongly support zoos and aquariums, and believe that connecting animals and people inspires conservation-minded choices. Young people also trust the environmental information they receive from zoos, with 70 percent ranking them among the best places to learn about animals and wildlife—higher than nature centers (60 percent) and even the outdoors (48 percent).

“For thousands of Minnesota kids, Como is that very first point of entry into the natural world—and we hope those visits help spark a life-long passion for conservation,” says Sticha. “We’re proud of helping Como make the progressive improvements to animal habitats and training that this next generation values, and we look forward to supporting future improvements like the new Seals and Sea Lions Habitat that will help serve them even better.”

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is the most visited cultural destination in the state of Minnesota, attracting 1.9 million visitors in 2015. It’s also the seventh most visited zoo in the United States.
Research shows that recycling and other sustainable practices are already second nature to Generation Z—in fact, 55 percent of them want to do much more. That’s part of the reason Como’s education department has just launched the Youth Engagement Program (a.k.a. YEP), an innovative youth development program aimed at giving students the skills to start community action projects in their own communities. The new pilot program is supported by contributions to Como Friends as well as funding from the Minnesota Legacy Amendment.

“At Como, we often hear about small conservation projects that classrooms and scout groups have worked on. These groups look to Como as a resource for information on ways to have even more impact with their schools or neighborhoods,” says Steph Kappel, Como’s new Conservation Engagement Coordinator. “YEP was designed with those groups in mind, with training and team-building experiences that will give conservation-minded teens the skills they need to assess community needs, learn how to work with partner organizations, and get support from other youth trying to accomplish the same goals in their own communities.”

Students will also have the chance to apply for micro-grants from Como Friends to help launch conservation projects in their own communities. “Como Friends has been a long-time supporter of Como’s teen-led interpretive program Nature Walk, and we see YEP as a great next step in Como’s youth development curriculum,” says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha. “We’re really looking forward to seeing what our YEP teams plan to do for conservation in their own schools and neighborhoods.”

**CONSERVATION INSPIRATION**

On your next visit to Como, look for certified sustainable palm oil: Baby Kemala the orangutan is just starting to swing through the trees, but her wild cousins are feeling the pinch of unsustainable palm oil plantations, which have contributed toward reducing orangutans’ habitats by 80 percent over the last 20 years. To help reverse the trend, look for products labeled as Certified Sustainable Palm Oil to support the companies committed to improving wild habitats with sustainable agricultural methods.

**Who’s the most powerful conservation role model at Como?** No surprise—it’s Sparky the Sea Lion, who taught more than 152,000 visitors in 2015 what they can do to keep plastics and other pollutants from ending up in the ocean.

Though she’s celebrating 60 years as a conservation icon this summer, her show is just one way Como’s two million visitors take conservation tips home every day:

Take the shuttle: Como’s circulator shuttle bus between the State Fair grounds parking lot and the Visitor Center isn’t just colorful—it also keeps 22 metric tons of carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere by cutting down on idling visitor cars.

Take home tips from Como

Looking for something new about a plant or an animal? Want Como to come to you? Last year, 7,654 students took part in one of Como’s traveling school group programs, meeting animal ambassadors like Cupid the Penguin.
Cool your consumption: From Party for the Planet every Earth Day to the upcoming Conservation Superheroes Weekend (September 10-11), our partners at Xcel Energy sponsor a host of special conservation events at Como, with onsite stations and games that teach visitors super-simple ways to conserve energy, from planting a tree, to turning off "vampire" appliances, to swapping incandescent bulbs for LEDs, to signing up for a home energy audit.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, following the recommendations of an average audit can cut your household energy use by up to 30 percent.

Skip meat on Mondays: Turning out unused lights isn’t the only way you can help polar bears like Buzz and Neil. If every household in the U.S. made a pledge to Meatless Mondays, it would be the equivalent of taking 20 million mid-size sedans off the road.

Choose sustainable stuff: Recycling is great, but to really close the resource loop, purchase products that have been made from recycled goods. The eye-catching blue trash and recycling bins around Como’s campus are a great example — each one is made from 1,125 recycled milk jugs.

Think before you throw: Many of the crafts and activities you see at Como during conservation weekends are made from “upcycled” sources that might otherwise get thrown away. For instance, with just a few holes, a take-out rotisserie chicken container makes a perfect miniature greenhouse for your vegetable garden seeds.

"Animal ambassadors like Kemala are so important for inspiring conservation, because visitors fall in love with them, and want to do what they can to keep wild populations safe.”

-Megan Elder

Orangutan SSP Vice Chair

SAVING SPECIES AT COMO ZOO
Q. How do you plan for a growing gorilla family?
A. Very carefully.

In fact, Como’s western lowland gorillas are all part of the Species Survival Plan, a program developed by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums in 1981 to help ensure the survival of selected threatened or endangered species in the wild by making smart conservation choices among zoo populations.

“The SSP program works as an insurance policy against extinction in the wild and, more so, ensures a long-term, self-sustaining, captive population that is genetically diverse and demographically stable so that we aren’t pulling from the wild,” says Como Zoo primate keeper Megan Elder, who serves several SSP leadership roles in her work as Orangutan SSP Vice Chair, Crowned lemur SSP Coordinator, and the keeper of both the International Orangutan Studbook and the Regional Crowned Lemur Studbook. “Where zoos may have once competed with each other, the mentality has changed over the last several decades, and these species are viewed as a shared population that we all work together to manage.”

Como Zoo takes part in 41 different SSP plans, from repatriating tiny Wyoming toads bred in Como’s Animal Support building to the wild every summer, to managing complex birth plans for orangutans like Markisa and baby Kemala. Como keepers with leadership roles in the SSP program meet regularly with other conservation and zoo partners across North America to make breeding recommendations and share knowledge. For instance, senior keeper Jo Kelly serves on the Antelope and Giraffe Advisory Group Steering Committee, while senior keeper Allison Jungheim is the SSP vice coordinator for the Hoffmann’s Two-Toed Sloth and serves on the steering committee for the Pangolin Anteater Xenarthran (PAX) Taxon Advisory Group.

While the SSP programs make breeding recommendations for particular animals, that doesn’t mean they always work out.

“Sometimes animals don’t like the match that’s been made for them,” says Jungheim. “The blue-eyed black lemur Thurman has been paired with three different males over the course of her time here at Como without success. Sometimes the lack of success is due to the animals not getting along, sometimes it just isn’t in the cards for the pair even if they get along great.”

Como Zoo has had great success breeding other species, including White-faced Sakis, Emperor Tamarins, Grant’s zebra, Sumatran orangutans and reticulated giraffe—institutional knowledge that Como shares with other members of each SSP.

“Como Zoo’s SSP participation has really grown in recent years, and it’s a nice star to have in our column," says Elder.

“Como Zoo’s SSP participation has really grown in recent years, and it’s a nice star to have in our column," says Elder.

Megan Elder

Orangutan SSP Vice Chair

Como Zoo’s SSP participation has really grown in recent years, and it’s a nice star to have in our column," says Elder.

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is Minnesota’s largest conservation classroom, teaching a total of 557,195 kids and adults through education programs that explore what each of us can do to contribute to a healthier environment for all living things.

Zoos attract more than 181 million annual visitors — more visitors than NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB annual attendance combined.

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES

PHOTO: J. BRIOL IMAGES
Receiving duplicate mailings?
Please help us to conserve mailing costs and paper.
If you receive more than one issue of the Como Friends Insider, call our office at (651) 487-8229.

Please Recycle

All Aflutter
“Blooming Butterflies” is the inspiration behind dozens of wonderful, winged gifts we’ve selected for summertime shoppers at Garden Safari Gifts. Stop in to see Como Friends’ remodeled gift shop and support the plants and animals you love with every purchase.

LOCATION
Visitor Center at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory

PHONE: 651.487.8222
HOURS: Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.