Animal Care at Como
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 Friends 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's mission is to inspire our public to value the presence of living things in our lives.

Como is open every day of the year!

Winter Hours (October 1 – March 31) 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Summer Hours (April 1 – September 30) 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

The American Public Gardens Association (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.

Creating the Rounds

Making the Rounds

Zoo Boo at Como Zoo

Medical Marvels

Budding Naturalists

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and wife Connie (center) joined Como Friends Board Chair Nancy Nelson and musicians Dallas Johnson and Siama Matuzungidi in the Sundown on the Savanna silent auction tent.

The sold-out Travelers Sunset Affair is always the hottest ticket at Como, and this year, the temperature was sizzling, too. “With a heat index of 100 degrees, we enjoyed authentically African weather,” says Caroline Mehloph, Como Friends’ director of events & sponsorship. “Fortunately, our guests were in great humor, and didn’t let the heat stop them from enjoying another great summer gala.” Como Friends board member Liz Smith (above) enjoyed Como Zoo’s new Giraffe Feeding Station — the focal point for Travelers Sunset Affair: Sundown on the Savanna. The event netted $185,000 to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

The air-conditioned tent offered cool comfort to Travelers Sunset Affair: Sundown on the Savanna revelers Kristina Nagle, Patrick Nagle, Katie Sargent, and Samantha McGough.

SIZZLING HOT DONATIONS AT TRAVELERS SUNSET AFFAIR: SUNDOWN ON THE SAVANNA
COMO FRIENDS ZOOBOO AT COMO ZOO CELEBRATES 29TH YEAR OF FAMILY FUNDRAISING

With 200 costumed characters, colorful treat stations, and “celebrity sightings” from Han Solo to Princess Elisa, Como Friends ZooBoo at Como Zoo may be an Instagrammers’ dream come true. But the popular family fundraiser got its start long before the invention of the selfie stick.

“Having your Halloween pictures taken at Como has become a really fun ritual that today’s parents are handing down to their own kids,” says Amanda Golden, Como Friends’ events manager. “Every year, we see families who’ve come to ZooBoo for years, making their support for Como Park Zoo and Conservatory part of a real family tradition.”

ZooBoo will transform Como Zoo’s grounds into a funny and fairy-tailed wonderland October 22, 23, 29 and 30. Como Friends members enjoy a 50 percent discount for their first four tickets to the event. Discounted general admission tickets are available online at comofriends.org until 3:00 pm October 22. After that, tickets to this enchanting family fundraiser are available at the gate for $7 per person, proceeds that help all of Como’s plants and animals thrive.

GET AHEAD ON YOUR HOLIDAY SHOPPING AT GARDEN SAFARI GIFTS

Annual visitors to Como are holding steady so far this year, but shopping receipts at Garden Safari Gifts have gone right through the roof. “Customers are really impressed by the way we’ve redesigned the gift shop to create more visual space and add even more unique gift items,” says Garden Safari Gifts Manager Terri Scheunemann. “People are surprised to hear that we haven’t added any square footage to the store — it just feels bigger and better.”

Como Friends’ board of directors recently helped to fund the redesign of Garden Safari Gifts, an important revenue stream that helps to pay for everything from zookeeper talks to free field trip programs at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. “Our goal was to maximize the great space we have in the Visitor Center, and to really promote the fact that shopping here is one of the simplest ways there is to support Como,” says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha.

Garden Safari Gifts is now gearing up for holiday shopping with great new apparel, many new “Made in Minnesota” items, and the “Only-at-Como” gift items that keep customers coming back, including Conservatory-grown bonsai and Sparky the Sea Lion plush. From Thanksgiving Day to December 24, volunteers, donors, and Como Friends members all will receive a 20% discount, with free gift wrapping services provided on December 8 from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. for supporters attending the Early Access Holiday Shopping and Flower Show event.

Bringing Kids to Como:

THE DONALD WEESNER FOUNDATION

The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has been a winter refuge for nearly five generations of Minnesotans. But its high heat and tropical humidity are an especially welcome discovery for students at St. Paul’s LEAP High School, many of whom are about to experience their very first winter in the frozen Midwest.

“A lot of our students are new immigrants and refugees from Burma, Syria, Honduras, Congo and many other parts of the world,” says Jill Michell, an art teacher at LEAP. “When they walk into the Conservatory, they’re kind of awestruck to see the plants they’re familiar with from their native countries, but in this whole new setting. Coming to Como is a great conversation starter for them.”

Finding fresh ways to infuse English Language Learning into arts, composition and other classwork is part of the mission at LEAP, where Michell and ELL Teacher Anne Lowe came up with a field trip plan to use plant and animal observation and illustration as a prompt for observational writing and composition. With Como’s free admission and a North Garden collection full of economic plants from Central America, the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia, and other homelands of LEAP students, they agreed the Conservatory would be the ideal destination.

“The only problem was figuring out how to get our students there, and that’s when we learned that Como can also help classrooms like ours with transportation scholarships,” Michell says. “In fact, St. Paul’s LEAP students are among the thousands of young visitors who’ve been introduced to the natural wonders at Como thanks to the Donald Weesner Foundation’s Yellow Bus Fund. The fund was established in 2000 to promote the late Donald Weesner’s strong commitment to conserving the natural environment and ecosystem of Minnesota by providing transportation assistance for school-aged children who otherwise would not be able to actively participate in environmental study and experiences at zoos, conservatories, and nature centers. Schools can apply for the funds by visiting Como’s Education page on the website, with awards to qualified groups available on a first-come, first-served basis.

“The Weesner Foundation’s Yellow Bus Fund is just one of the ways we work with our partners in philanthropy to make Como more accessible,” says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha. “For a lot of student visitors, Como provides that first lesson in a life-long discovery about the ways that people, plants and animals are connected. We’re really fortunate that the Donald Weesner Foundation supports Como’s role in inspiring conservation practices in our community, with funding that helps bring even more young people here every year.”

LEAP students have come to Como for the last two winters, fanning out across Como Zoo and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory to snap pictures on school iPads, images that they use again in classroom assignments. “Many of these students are just learning English, so getting off of school grounds and coming to Como is really exciting,” says Lowe. “It’s a great way to connect what they know in their first languages to writing in English.”

Michell says their students are looking forward to this season’s Como trip, and she recommends the experience to other educators. “Como is such a comfortable place to bring students because it’s so self-contained, and kids can move around each garden and linger over the things that interest them,” she says. “It’s a little green classroom that makes a big impression.”
Morning rounds are a routine for many medical professionals, but few doctors can claim a more diverse pool of patients than Dr. Micky Trent. An associate professor at the University of Minnesota’s College of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Trent starts every Tuesday morning at Como Zoo, tending to the health needs of more than 400 creatures, great and small.

Como Friends Insider recently made the rounds with Dr. Trent to find out what it takes to keep animal ambassadors from more than 260 species healthy at Como Zoo.

A long-time partnership with the University of Minnesota’s veterinary school is just one of the ways Como Zoo keeps more than 400 animals healthy and curious.

Como Zoo’s aquatics keepers consult with Dr. Trent about introducing two new penguins from New Orleans to the rest of the penguins in the Aquatics building.

PATIENT NAMES: CHICORY AND SKUA

Species: African penguin

Like all newly arrived animals, this penguin pair from New Orleans’ Aquarium of the Americas spent their first 30-days at Como Zoo in medical quarantine. But when Chicory seemed lethargic and lost interest in eating, Dr. Trent brought her to the University of Minnesota’s Raptor Center for a special work-up. “The blood work was fine, but she was just starting to molt, which may have been the cause of her depression,” says Senior Keeper Allison Jungheim. “Now she’s got a brand new set of tuxedo feathers and she’s looking great.” The stress of being introduced to a new population can also make penguins more susceptible to a fungus prevalent among African penguins, but when the pair successfully sorted out their place in the penguin hierarchy, Dr. Trent took them off an anti-fungal medication she’d prescribed. “Penguins can be rough on each other, so it’s something we like to watch closely,” she says. “Fortunately, these two are fitting right in.”
PATIENT NAME: FRIEDA, NOW FREDERICK
Species: Sulcata or African Spurred Tortoise

In August, this African Spurred Tortoise suffered a puncture wound, possibly from a run-in with a kudu or another tortoise in the African Hoofstock habitat. Closer examination revealed that the tortoise named Frieda was actually male, one possible cause for aggression with the other tortoise Fritz. Common in the pet trade, both Sulcata tortoises were donated to Como Zoo by a private individual “who probably had no idea that Frieda wasn’t a female,” says Jungheim. “This is a bird with a brain the size of an eyeball, so I’m not sure how much she’s going to remember about this experience.”

PATIENT NAME: OLIVE
Species: Ostrich

“One of the best parts of this job is that you do get called out of meetings for very interesting reasons,” says Dr. Trent, who answered an emergency call from Como Zoo last fall when Olive the ostrich was kicked by a giraffe who shares her habitat. The ostrich traveled to the University of Minnesota to have her broken wing pinned, a procedure that healed up in a matter of weeks. “I’m not sure you could say Olive learned her lesson about giving the giraffes their space,” says Jungheim. “This is a bird with a brain the size of an eyeball, so I’m not sure how much she’s going to remember about this experience.”

PATIENT NAME: FLETCHER
Species: Harbor Seal

Fletcher the harbor seal was only a few days old when he was washed ashore and abandoned in Santa Barbara, California, where a marine mammal rescue group stepped in to save his life. Blind in one eye, he was deemed unreleasable in the wild and moved to Como Zoo in 2011, where he receives twice-yearly eye exams from veterinary ophthalmologist Dr. Robert Larocca. Since eye problems like glaucoma and cataracts can be an issue for pinnipeds, Como Zoo’s keepers use daily training to help desensitize animals to medical treatments like eyedrops and ointments.

PATIENT NAMES: SCHROEDER, SAMSON, JABIR AND VIRGIL
Species: Western Lowland Gorilla

These large male gorillas may look fierce, but when it’s time for their vaccinations, they sometimes act like big babies. “Samson in particular really hates needles,” says Jungheim. “He doesn’t want to come near us.” When the great apes need more serious intervention, Dr. Trent often relies on Como Zoo’s retired veterinarian Dr. Ralph Farnsworth (inset, right), a familiar face to Como’s great apes, to deliver the medicine via dart gun. The goal is to minimize the stress the great apes feel when they encounter veterinary care, says Trent, “So now I’m not Schroeder’s least favorite person. But I’m close.”

PATIENT NAME: TK
Species: River Turtle

Keepers in Tropical Encounters noticed some abrasions on the shell of this river turtle, which they pulled out of the habitat for an appointment with Dr. Trent. The vet prescribed “occasional dry docking and some antibiotic ointment, and now the problem is all cleared up,” says Como Zoo Senior Keeper Jo Kelly.
**Primate Poop Contributes to Medical Discoveries**

Como Zoo’s primates just made a helpful contribution to medical researchers at the University of Minnesota, providing stool samples that are giving researchers new insights about the bacteria that live in the guts of all primates—humans and monkeys alike.

Scientists collected a few thousand primate fecal samples from Como Zoo and compared them to others collected from zoos and in the wild. They found that zoo monkeys tend to have gut bacteria dominated by two species found frequently in humans, while monkeys in the wild have much more diverse gut bacteria. The findings may offer insights into why zoo primates can suffer from gastrointestinal disorders, and why humans have high rates of metabolic and autoimmune disorders. “Monkeys in zoos get infected by our bacteria….They lose the native [bacterial] flora that would help them digest those plants, and they get colonized with the same bugs that we have,” lead researcher Dan Knights, a computational microbiologist at the U of M, told MPR News. This new finding was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in September.

**Species: Orangutan**

"Primate care is very much like human medicine with some unique disorders," explains Dr. Trent. That’s why Como Zoo’s troop of orangutans get an annual flu shot, just like the families who come to visit them. “You have to worry about what they can give you, but more importantly, what you can give them. Our primates are probably a cleaner population than your average group of people on a bus.”

**Species: Polar Bear**

Even before he moved to Como Zoo as a youth, Neil had tooth trouble that required a root canal. His dental history is one reason keepers have trained the twin polar bears to open their mouths—a behavior visitors often see during public polar bear training sessions. "Como Zoo’s training program has been life-saving for the animals and it’s made my job so much easier," says Dr. Trent, who helped to perform another root canal on the polar bear in January. Since anesthesia and surgery is stressful, the polar bear’s health care team made the most of the intervention, drawing blood, performing x-rays and providing dental care all in the same day. "That’s the biggest challenge that most people don’t think about is that we can’t do much of an exam on some of the larger animals, so if they have to be knocked down, you want to be ready to evaluate and treat as many issues as possible.”

**Como Zoo’s Medical Marvels**

**Harriet the Flamingo’s Prosthetic Feet:** Long-time Como Zoo resident Harriet the Flamingo (1970-2009) suffered from a recurrent cancer in her feet that required the removal of her middle toe on one foot—and years later, the same toe on the other foot, too. "Flamingos only have the three toes, so after each surgery, we feared she wouldn’t walk again. But each time she figured it out,” says Animal Registrar and Senior Keeper Jo Kelly. Harriet got a little extra stability from a special prosthetic wax foot made especially for the flamingo, who also enjoyed being carried around by keepers.

**Berlin’s Big Surgery:** Evacuated in a daring rescue from Duluth’s Lake Superior Zoo during the 2012 flood, Berlin the polar bear also had a health emergency while she was a temporary guest in Polar Bear Odyssey. When keepers found her lethargic and unresponsive in October 2012, exploratory surgery at the University of Minnesota uncovered a large necrotic mass that may have been causing internal bleeding. Berlin made a full recovery, and is now a popular resident of the Kansas City Zoo.

**Mufasa’s Big Break:** The first time he encountered tigers on the other side of the outdoor large cat habitat, Como Zoo-born male lion Mufasa had such a fright he turned quickly and tripped over a log, breaking his leg. “He completely panicked, and his leg had to be pinned” at the University of Minnesota, says Kelly. “He is one clumsy lion.”

**Markisa’s Miracle Babies:** Both Jaya and Kemala, Como Zoo’s young orangutans, were born by c-section, a major undertaking in the zoo world. In fact, Como Zoo’s success at managing the complicated birth plan of baby Jaya in 2007, and quickly reuniting mother and baby after surgery, is one of the reasons Primate Keeper Megan Elder was selected to lead the International Orangutan Stud Book, a role that allows her to share Como keepers’ insights with zoo partners around the world.
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