Como Insider
A Publication of Como Friends

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Great Expectations

From the greatest of apes to the smallest of snakes, Como Zoo’s animal family keeps growing

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Travel with Como Friends

Get Packing: Sign up for a spring fling to Panama, or an autumn tour of the Land of the Rising Sun with Como Friends’ Travel Program

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.

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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.

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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.
Information sessions for Como Friends’ 2015 trips to Panama and Japan are coming up! Join us in the Auditorium on Sunday, January 18 at 2 p.m. to learn more about the tropical itinerary we’ve got planned for Panama, March 14-22. Travel consultant Alyssa Schulke will also share her insights about Como Friends’ November tour, exploring the garden arts and cultural attractions of Japan at 3:15 p.m. Call 651-487-8229 to reserve your space at one or both of these informational workshops.

Fans of Bouquets won’t have to wait much longer for the return of Como Friends’ popular wine-tasting fundraiser. Transplanted from December to February for the first time, this elegant evening of fine wines and tastings from the Twin Cities’ top restaurants will now feature a beer garden, plus a VIP pass for guests who just can’t wait to uncork.

“We’re looking forward to reintroducing this event later in the winter with some fun new features that we think our guests are going to love,” says Caroline Mehlhop, Como Friends’ Director of Sponsorships & Events. “We’ve expanded the event throughout the Visitor Center and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory to make more room for our sell-out crowds. We’ve added a new VIP option that will give guests early access to the event, and an exclusive sampling of great appetizers and wines. Best of all, we’ve added a beer garden to showcase some of Minnesota’s great microbrews and craft beers.”

Tickets are $60 per person and $100 for a VIP pass, with a $5 discount for current Como Friends members. Don’t miss seeing Bouquets bloom again this winter—grab your tickets today online at comofriends.org or at 651-487-8229!
Como Friends turned Give to the Max Day on November 13 into a virtual baby shower for several expectant zoo moms, and Como's community really delivered. A generous $20,000 challenge match from Horton Inc. inspired nearly 300 individual donors—many of them first-time Como Friends supporters—to help get newborns like zebras Ruckus and Melee off to a healthy start, while providing state-of-the-art veterinary care to the more than 1,000 animals in Como’s care. All totaled, Give to the Max day showered more than $48,700 on Como Zoo’s baby boom, a great investment in Como’s growing animal family.

A SHOWER OF SUPPORT FOR COMO ZOO’S NEWBORNS AND NEW MOMS

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More than 20,000 turn out for ZooBoo

More than 20,000 visitors made #ComoZooBoo2014 a hot hashtag in October, helping Como Friends raise more than $92,000 to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. Filling treat bags at our ZooBoo fundraiser is a year-round effort made possible by Como Friends’ generous sponsors who help us collect a full range of family-friendly snacks, from super sweet Halloween goodies to healthy snacks for everyday eating.

“Parents tell us they’re thrilled to see choices like baby carrots and cheese sticks, but it just wouldn’t be a Halloween party without some sugary goodies and salty snacks, too,” says Amanda Golden, Como Friends’ Events Associate.

This year, our dedicated crew of more than 200 volunteers each night packed trick or treat bags with more than 150,000 goodies over the five nights, thanks to our wonderful product sponsors: General Mills, Minnesota Corn Growers, Crystal Farms, Country Choice Organics, KLN Brands, Pearsons Nut Rolls, Bit O’ Honey, Sixlets, Old Dutch, Food should Taste Good, Larabars, Cub, Wild Harvest, MellowSmellow and St. Paul-Ramsey County Public Health. Thank you!
Before Polar Bear Odyssey was built, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory called in the experts at Xcel Energy to find ways to make the exhibit a model of good conservation practices, inside and out.

“We partnered on the polar bear home, and worked with Como Zoo to help them build a facility that’s really energy efficient,” says Crystal Manik, Senior Marketing Business Consultant for Xcel Energy. “We wanted to make sure Como could invest more in the animals that live there, and the folks who come to visit, than in paying high energy bills every month.”

Those are the same conservation tools Xcel Energy is now sharing with customers and Como visitors thanks to a growing partnership with Como Friends. During several high-traffic conservation weekends, energy efficiency experts from Xcel Energy can be found on Como’s campus talking to visitors about everything from cutting consumption with more efficient light bulbs, to rebate programs for recycling old, energy-hogging refrigerators. Xcel Energy also helped produce the educational video that nearly a million visitors see every year in the Polar Bear Outpost, which shows how consumer choices in our own homes can help improve the environment for wild polar bears and other threatened species.

Como Insider recently talked with Manik about how sponsorships like this can serve conservation efforts at Como and across our community.

Xcel Energy has been a long-time supporter of capital improvements and education efforts at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, but over the last few years, you’ve put more resources into reaching Como’s two million visitors through Como Friends’ growing sponsorship program. Why is that?

A few years ago we helped sponsor Party for the Planet, the Earth Day celebration at Como, and had such a tremendous response from visitors we realized we needed to be there year-round. When it comes to sharing what we know about cutting energy costs, it’s really about going out and talking to our customers where they are in the community, and Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is a great gathering place. It’s where so many of our customers who are looking for solutions for their homes take their families, so it’s a natural place for Xcel Energy to meet with our customers, to hear some of the challenges people are facing heating their homes in the winter, and to connect them with resources and energy-saving solutions.

But it’s not all business. We can’t help noticing that the kids who stop by your displays are having a lot of fun.

That’s right. The first year we came in with bikes where kids could see the difference between the energy needed to light up a standard incandescent light bulb, and how much less energy it takes to power up a CFL. Now we’ve got a gigantic Connect Four-style game that’s a lot of fun for the smaller members of the family, and that gives the parents and grandparents a chance to step aside and have longer conversations about energy efficient solutions that might inspire them.

What do Como visitors have questions about, and what are you learning from their input?

Folks are taking the time to talk about not only how they’ve reduced their energy usage, but they’re also asking us great questions about renewable energy. Customers are the reason we’re the number one supplier of wind power in the country today, and visitors at Como really support those programs. They drive us to make even better decisions around the energy portfolio we utilize as we provide safe, consistent and reliable energy to customers.

How can corporate partners help drive the conservation mission of Como?

Como’s mission aligns beautifully with our own commitment to the environment at Xcel Energy, and we’ve found this is a great place to have meaningful conversations with our customers. Como is one of the last zoos in the country that is fully free, and focused on making the environment and nature available to everyone—not just folks who have a higher income level. Como can provide that experience because of the generosity of their partners and the surrounding community, which is amazing to me.
Species preservation efforts breed excitement—and heartache—as zookeepers strive to get zoo moms and babies off to a healthy start.

With more than a thousand animals to care for every day, Como Zoo is always teeming with life, but long-time animal curator John Dee admits the last six months have been a little crazy. "Keep a diary," is the advice he’s been giving younger zookeepers on his staff. "You may never see another year like this again in your whole career."

Since last July, Como Zoo has welcomed two baby zebras, seventeen Emerald tree boas, and thousands of endangered amphibians, all while introducing a new breeding tiger to the large cat habitat, and making room in
Polar Bear Odyssey for two new polar bears just celebrating their second birthdays. In the space of a single week in November, zookeepers also coped with the death of a five-day-old infant gorilla, the first ever born at Como Zoo, and cheered the arrival of a six-foot giraffe, one of the rare zoo babies born during the daylight hours.

“It’s been a lot of highs and lows, and so you try to stay balanced in the middle somewhere because so much can happen when it comes to animal births,” says Dee. At press time in early December, keepers were awaiting the arrival of a second gorilla to be born to mother Dara and planning the c-section birth for Markisa the orangutan, due later this winter. With high infant mortality rates both in the wild and in captivity, great ape births are a high-risk endeavor, one reason Como Zoo counts on its long-time partnership with the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine for guidance and support.

“We have incredibly detailed birth plans in place, and we make decisions as a team, but managing the arrival of a primate is more complicated than you can even imagine,” Dee says, adding that Como Zoo received congratulations and condolences from across the zoo world when gorilla Alice delivered and then lost her first infant. “Helping keep these species going is what we’re here for, so losing an animal is really tough on everyone.”

A decade ago, Como Zoo was cautious about sharing the news of the breeding efforts that go on behind the scenes, preferring to wait until newborns were ready to meet the public before announcing the news of their arrival. “Now we share the news” says Como campus manager Michelle Furrer. “Being trans-
parent is also another way to teach the public to care about conservation. When you see some of the struggles animals have bringing offspring into the world, it really drives home the challenges of sustainability for many species. We want to share with Como visitors that whole journey of life, because it’s really important to see the full picture.”

**Match Making**

Como Zoo plays an active role in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ Species Survival Plan (SSP) for 37 species, from sloths, to tigers, to tiny Wyoming toads. But predicting which breeding recommendations will succeed is more art than science, says senior keeper Allison Jungheim. “Playing matchmaker doesn’t always work. You look for animals that are proven breeders and you hope for the best, but you can never guarantee that it will work,” she says. “Sometimes it’s about timing, but it can also be about the personalities of the animals.”

For instance, Chloe the sloth and her partner Slo Mo have been paired up for nearly four years and haven’t produced offspring. Meanwhile, two emerald tree boas that never mated successfully were reintroduced in a behind-the-scenes habitat, and have since produced three clutches of live offspring, the most recent born on November 12.

While Gorilla Forest was purpose-built for a family troop, zookeepers couldn’t predict how silverback Schroeder would react to his three female roommates, after spending most of his life as a bachelor. “He figured it out quickly,” says Jungheim, who says that once keepers observed breeding behavior in...
the troop, females Dara and Alice were taken off of birth control last January.

**Birth Plan**

But predicting when zoo babies will eventually arrive requires more than a calendar. Prey animals such as giraffes are adapted to “hide” their pregnancies, displaying few physical or behavioral clues about their condition during their 15-month gestation period. That’s why zookeepers keep track of all breeding behavior they observe, and take note when mating behaviors between animals dies down.

“That can be a sign that the female is expecting again, but it’s hard to pinpoint a due date,” says hoofstock keeper Adam Nigon. To stay prepared for a birthing window nearly two months wide, zookeepers set up a birthing stall for Daisy the giraffe layered with several inches of sand. The ground cover helped to soften the landing for her 145-pound calf born on November 25, providing the traction the six-foot-tall newborn needed to get up on all four legs.

Zookeepers are also keeping a close eye on Markisa, who underwent an emergency c-section for the birth of baby Jaya in 2007. While Markisa recovered from surgery, Como Zoo keepers provided round-the-clock care and hand-feedings for Jaya, successfully reintroducing mother and baby within 12 days of birth—a success story that

**Delivery Plan:** Markisa’s emergency c-section delivery made international news when baby Jaya was born in 2007. Her high-risk history called for a more managed birth plan with Como Zoo’s partners at the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine.

**Como Mourns:** Gorilla Alice holds her first offspring, a male that died just five days after birth, likely due to feeding issues. Like their cousins in the wild, zoo-born western lowland gorillas have a high mortality rate. Nearly a quarter of young gorillas don’t survive to their first birthday.
earned international attention in the zoo world.

Knowing her birth history has helped zookeepers and veterinarians plan ahead for a more managed delivery, but it doesn’t reduce the nerves many of Markisa’s caregivers felt in the weeks leading up to her due date. “I’m more nervous about this than I was for the birth of my own children,” Jungheim says. “We just want everything to go as smoothly as it possibly can.”

New Moms
Markisa’s planned c-section is an unusual event in the zoo world, where most zoo moms manage just fine on their own. For instance, last July, Grant’s zebra Minnie surprised zookeepers with a newborn foal who was already standing and nursing by the time visitors arrived at 10 a.m. Minnie and her newborn even stayed in the African hoofstock yard for four days before the mother nudged the foal, Melee, into the interior habitat.

Hoofstock keeper Nigon describes Minnie as “a little stand-offish and not sure of new things,” while her offspring Melee is just the opposite. “Melee is a curious little zebra, and it’s been interesting to watch Minnie cue off of her,” he says. “Melee will come over and eat out of our hands, and just at the end of the summer we got to a point where Minnie will try it, too.”

Nigon says it’s been gratifying to watch zebras Minnie and Thelma, both first-time mothers, take so naturally to their new roles. “They both are doing a really good job and the babies are very energetic and full of life,” he says. “They seem to be very understanding with their little ones and they do a very good job leading them around and introducing them to new things. It’s going to be a lot of fun watching them grow.”

Safe Landing: Zookeepers spread several inches of sand in the back-stage birthing stall for Daisy the giraffe to soften the landing for her female offspring, named Skye by a generous Give to the Max Day donor. The six-foot, 145-pound newborn was standing on all fours and nursing soon after her birth on November 25, 2014.
Cuteness and conservation come together in Como Friends’ Animal Sponsorship program

As fast-growing zebras Ruckus and Melee make clear every day, zoo babies don’t stay little for long. While zebras weigh around 65 pounds at birth, it will just take two years for them to stand nearly as tall as their parents—just one of the animal facts you can learn when you become an Animal Sponsor.

“Being an animal sponsor is a fun way to learn more about the animals that intrigue you, at the same time you’re contributing to their care,” says Takara Henegar, Como Friends’ Membership Manager. Sponsorships of $40 or more include a fact sheet, an animal plush, and a certificate of sponsorship—tangible items that can teach people a little more about the animals they already love. “That’s one reason why animal sponsorships are so popular with classrooms, because when you connect with one animal, it inspires you to want to learn more about the whole species.”

In fact, several area preschools encourage students to pitch their pennies toward sponsoring a favorite animal, a contribution that teaches children the value of charitable giving, and provides a place for them to focus their environmental curriculum. “We know of one school in particular where the teachers have been sponsoring Chloe the sloth for many years,” says Henegar. “Kids come to see her in her tree at Tropical Encounters, and then teachers use that as the starting point for a lesson plan about the plight of the rainforests.”

With more zoo babies expected in the coming months, Como Friends is featuring selected animal sponsorships for $40 each—$10 off the regular $50 package price. “Como visitors are really supportive of the care we provide our expectant moms and zoo babies, and sponsorships are a fun way to take part in it,” Henegar says. “Families know that welcoming a new baby is expensive, so if you care about getting these newborns off to a great start at Como Zoo, this is a great way to help.”

Garden Safari Specials
“Grandparents are big fans of the animal sponsorship program,” says Garden Safari Gifts manager Terri Scheunemann, who has seen a surge of new sponsorships at the gift shop and online at comofriends.org. “Every package comes with a cute plush animal that kids can take home, and comes attached to a great memory of visiting Como with their family.” Proceeds from the sponsorship program help to provide direct care to Como Zoo’s animals, from the feisty zebras Ruckus and Melee, to the 17 slithery emerald tree boas born at Como in November.
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Get Packing with Como Friends
Panama: Flora & Fauna, March 14 - 22, 2015
Japan: Gardens, Cities and Culture, October 31 - November 14, 2015

From the ancient art of Bonsai to lightning fast bullet trains, Como Friends’ two-week tour of Japan will immerse you in the iconic cities, world-class gardens, and quiet wonders of the Land of the Rising Sun.

Need a spring fling? Space is still available for our upcoming spring tour exploring the Flora & Fauna of Panama from March 14-22.

Find out more about both once-in-a-lifetime trips at our upcoming Como Friends Travel Program Q & A on January 18. Call 651-487-8229 to attend.