100 Years in Bloom

The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory celebrates its first centennial as Minnesota’s favorite perennial

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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
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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.

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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Members, Mark Your Calendar

April 1 marks the return of “Summer Hours” at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, when the start of spring extends visitor hours from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Other dates to mark:

- April 21—Tune in to KSTP Channel 5 for a fun community phone-a-thon for Como featuring cameo appearances and sponsorship deals for your favorite animals and gardens at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

- May 16, 9:15 a.m. to 10 a.m.—Enjoy an early access performance of the Sparky Show before she makes her Memorial Day debut.

- June 20, 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.—Be the first in line to see the new Centennial Garden, take a greenhouse tour, and learn about 100 years of history at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory.

Support for Como Blooms at Bouquets

A sold-out crowd of 450 guests turned out for Bouquets, a spirited fundraiser transplanted from December to February for the first time this year.

“Moving the event to mid-winter was a great opportunity to highlight the Winter Flower Show, and to introduce our new beer garden which was a huge hit with guests,” says Como Friends Events Associate Amanda Golden.

New restaurants such as Mojo Monkey Donuts and Porterhouse Steak & Seafood joined a stable of such long-time partners as Muffuletta, providing gourmet treats that paired beautifully with specially selected wines and beers. Many thanks to Andersen Corporation, Western Bank, Lancer Catering, BrightWines, and Original Gravity, and to silent auction supporters who helped the event raise funds to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

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The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory will be the setting for 2015’s Sunset Affair gala set for Thursday, July 16 from 5:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. “Centennials and Perennials” is the theme for the annual fundraising event, which set an all-time record for donations in 2014.

“With so many new exhibits, Como Zoo has been the focal point for the last few years at Sunset Affair, but now with this wonderful anniversary to celebrate, it’s time to let the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory shine,” says Caroline Mehlhop, Como Friends’ Director of Events & Sponsorships. The setting will allow for new features such as lawn games, garden tours and a dessert course served within the Centennial Garden, a new landscape garden opening this spring.

“While we’ll be celebrating the birthday of this great Victorian building, this is definitely not your grandparents’ garden party,” Mehlhop says. Live music, special VIP seating options, and amazing animal ambassadors are all part of the plan to raise community support for Minnesota’s most visited cultural attraction.

For more information, visit www.comofriends.org
Minnesotans love getting back to their gardens every spring, and Como Friends board member Greg McNeely is no exception. “I can’t wait to see the new Centennial Garden this spring,” McNeely says about the landscape garden about to bloom in between the Visitor Center and Sunken Garden wing. “I’ve seen the plans and this garden will be a terrific upgrade to the entrance. That’s part of what’s so gratifying about being involved in a place that people care about. Como just keeps getting better and better.”

McNeely is the son of the late Marjorie McNeely, a one-time president of the St. Paul Garden Club, and a frequent visitor to the Conservatory. After her death in 1998, her family established a $7 million endowment gift to Como in her memory, to make sure the destination she loved would last long into the future.

“We knew it was a good alignment with all the things mom cared about,” McNeely says, adding that he and his father Don, who died in 2009, received a memorable affirmation of their investment one evening when two long-time volunteers followed the father and son into the parking lot. “We didn’t know them, but they knew who we were, and they told us that they’d been volunteers at Como for 25 years, and how grateful they were for our family’s commitment,” he recalls. “I remember they walked away and Dad and I looked at each other and said, ‘Wow.’ It was such a heartfelt thank you, it was just overwhelming. But that’s what Como means to people.”

In fact, Como’s strong volunteer corps was one reason that Don McNeely, a prominent businessman and philanthropist, considered Como a good investment with a great rate of return. “My dad felt very strongly about the volunteer component and how successful it is,” McNeely says. “We wouldn’t be able to reach nearly as many people, and do the work we do without the help of volunteers.” In 2014, Como had another record year of engagement, with 1,540 volunteers (including 309 new recruits), who contributed more than 51,500 hours at Como—the equivalent of nearly 25 full-time employees.

“The fact that Como has such incredible community support and is, at the same time, incredibly cost efficient is something Minnesotans and their legislators really need to know more about,” McNeely says. “With all of the great improvements we’ve seen over the last few years, and with these huge attendance numbers, I think the public can see that Como is a statewide asset that really deserves public funding and support.

“When you compare Como against these other institutions, and you see that we bring in two million people a year for a little over three dollars a person, it’s clear that Como is just a great investment,” McNeely says. “I can’t think of any institution that gives Minnesota a better bang for the buck.”
The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory celebrates a century of support from the community

Cleaning the windows after a long winter is a major chore for most Minnesotans, but at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, it’s more like a military operation.

With steel beams and glass panes that reach more than 64 feet over the historic Palm Dome, and rare and exotic plants that require kid glove care, window washing is a multi-phased event that requires careful planning, high-wire rigging, and the help of tall cranes provided by St. Paul’s Department of Forestry.

“But just check out how shiny those panes are,” horticulturist Margaret Yeakel-Twum says as she inspects the
In 1851, the cast-iron and plate glass “Crystal Palace” in London’s Hyde Park launched a decades-long fashion that made glass conservatories a “must have” accessory for every city with world-class aspirations. Designed by Frederick Nussbaumer and civil engineer Max Toltz, the King Construction Co. of Tonawanda, New York, built Como Conservatory from steel and glass for $58,825 in 1914, just under $1.4 million in today’s dollars.

Como Friends supporters are invited to a sneak peek of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s newest attraction, the Centennial Garden, the focal point for our centennial celebrations.

Join us for an early access unveiling ceremony on June 20th from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.; call 651-487-8229 to r.s.v.p.

Como visitors may notice a special spit and polish on display at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory this year as the campus approaches the 100th anniversary of its opening in November 1915. In June, the Conservatory will attract the national spotlight as several hundred of the country’s top public gardeners gather at Como for the 75th annual conference of the American Public Gardens Association, co-hosted with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. This season, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory will also unveil the new Centennial Garden, a stylized nod to the traditional European landscape gardens that drew visitors to Como at the turn of the century.

“This centennial gives us a wonderful excuse to showcase how much the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has meant to this community for so many years,” says Horticultural Curator Tina Dombrowski. “But it’s also a great time to celebrate all the ways this generous community has helped the Conservatory grow and thrive.”

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1974, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is one of the few Victorian-style glasshouses to survive in North America. But without just the right climate of civic pride and forward thinking, the Conservatory might never have been built at all.

“American cities grew up very fast during the Victorian era, with almost no planning or effort to preserve public spaces,” says architecture critic Larry Millett, who has covered Minnesota’s landmark buildings in such books as Lost Twin Cities and Once There Were Castles. But as the 20th century dawned, with robust leaders like Teddy Roosevelt leading the fight for national parks and the public domain, cities began to see the value of saving land and resources for the public benefit. “It was all part of the ‘City Beautiful’ movement, a period of relative wealth in the
late 1890s and early 1900s where you saw a lot of building, and when many of the grand public libraries and other institutions came into being,” Millett says. “It was about creating a more beautiful public realm, and adding a sense of European class to these messy American cities.”

One of the City Beautiful movement’s most vocal proponents was St. Paul Parks Superintendent Frederick Nussbaumer, a German born landscape designer who lobbied for the creation of a Kew Gardens-style Conservatory for nearly 20 years. City leaders finally took the plunge in 1914, breaking ground on the Conservatory at the same time the State Capitol, the Cathedral of St. Paul, St. Paul’s Central Library, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts were all under construction as well.

“Como’s Conservatory is part of that golden age of Minnesota architecture between about 1900 to 1920, where you had the rise of the Prairie School, along with these grand public buildings,” says Millett. “Architecture of that period tends to be really monumental and well built, and the public has a great deal of affection for these buildings.”

The strong sense of ownership Como visitors feel for the Conservatory has helped save the building from a few calamities over the decades. The Great Depression forced much of the Conservatory to close for lack of funds, and rusted rivets were a serious structural problem through the 1950s. A devastating 1962 hail storm smashed thousands of glass panes, but the plexiglass replacements blocked sunlight to plants, and required a second renovation back to glass.

Citizens concerned about preserving the Conservatory’s unique history formed a restoration society which helped secure Como’s place on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, and later, a $12 million renovation that opened in the early 1990s. Their efforts were part of a long legacy of community and documentary groups that raised private funding to protect the Conservatory’s future, a mission that’s been carried forward by Como Friends—a merger of several nonprofit fundraising groups that incorporated under one banner in 1999. Over the last 15 years, Como Friends has invested more than $35 million in improvements at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory and the Como Zoo, including the new Fern Room opened in 2005, Tropical Encounters opened in 2006, and The Ordway Gardens opened in 2013.

While the Conservatory may be 100 years old, a century of community commitment to the building and the botanical collections it contains have made the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s future brighter than ever. “Conservatories like this got their start during the industrial revolution, an era when people began to realize how essential it is for humans to stay connected with nature, and that lesson has only been strengthened over the last century,” says Dombrowski. “We have an affinity for plants and animals, and we find comfort and inspiration in nature. I believe that’s one reason why the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory endures and is relevant to visitors today.”
Since the opening of The Ordway Gardens in 2013, many Como visitors have been surprised to discover a nationally recognized Japanese garden growing just beyond the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s North Garden. “Wait…was this garden always here?” has become one of the most frequently asked questions in the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden, a beloved exterior garden four decades in the making.

“We love to hear visitors make this mistake, because it’s proof the public is seeing this familiar garden in a new light,” says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. “Encouraging the community to rediscover this gem was one of the goals of The Ordway Gardens, and we’re thrilled by the great reception the Japanese Garden has been getting.”

Como Friends raised the $2.8 million in private funding to build The Ordway Gardens wing, which now connects visitors to the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden. For the last three seasons, the nonprofit fundraising partner to the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has also engaged international horticultural consultant John Powell to head up a phased effort to bring the garden back to its roots, realigning the look of the sansui garden with the original design plans first presented as a gift from St. Paul’s sister city of Nagasaki, Japan.

“Our over the years, pieces of the original plan for the garden got lost in translation, and a little overgrown," says Tina Dombrowski, the Conservatory’s horticultural curator. Having Powell’s consulting help for such tasks as pruning trees has been invaluable to Como’s horticultural team, she says, because “eastern techniques for pruning are very different from our approach in the west, and our goal is to make the Japanese garden as authentic as possible.”

The restoration work is already earning accolades in the gardening world, where Como’s Japanese Garden was recently ranked as one of the nation’s “rising stars” in Sukiya Living magazine. Keeping that momentum going is one of the goals of a new $1 million endowment campaign Como Friends has launched in 2015, funding that will provide a permanent source of support for annual maintenance needs of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden.

“Having an endowment fund has been critical to preserving the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory for future generations, and we want to safeguard the Japanese Garden in the same way,” says Sticha. “The garden is a symbol of peace, and cultural cooperation, and we want to help it to thrive long into the future.” To learn more about the Endowment Fund, contact Jackie Sticha at 651-487-8225.

### CULTIVATING COMMITMENT

The Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden is the focus of a new fundraising effort at Como Friends.

Taking part in Como Friends’ Travel Program is another great way to learn more about the Japanese Garden and the ancient horticultural traditions reflected there. On our upcoming two-week tour of Japan, Como Friends travelers will be able to immerse themselves in the culture—and horticulture—of the Land of the Rising Sun.

**October 31–November 14**
**$9,950 per person**
(airfare not included)

Timed to coincide with the peak of fall foliage in acclaimed gardens such as Korakuen and Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, the itinerary was customized by our friends at Schulke Travel to include fascinating cultural explorations covering everything from bullet trains to Bonsai. Limited space for this once-in-a-lifetime trip is still available.

To learn more, call 651-487-8229.
Baby’s First Days

Markisa cooperated with frequent ultrasound training sessions that allowed keepers to monitor fetal heart rate and obtain bone measurements to determine the best day to deliver.

On January 7th, a team of keepers accompanied Markisa for surgery at the U of M, which was attended by more than a dozen specialists in reproductive veterinary medicine and human obstetrics and gynecology. Moments after she was born, a team of veterinarians quickly cleaned up the three and a half pound female who stayed at the University for round-the-clock care for her first three days. Meanwhile, Markisa returned to Como Zoo to begin her recovery. While she couldn’t be in the same space as son Jaya, “they could touch, and pass treats back and forth, and reconnect that way,” says Elder.

“Because she needed a scheduled C-section there was more worry about getting the timing right, and Markisa did have some complications that we monitored closely,” says Elder, who also serves as the vice chair of the Orangutan Species Survival Plan committee and the keeper of the International Orangutan Studbook. Signs of bleeding late in Markisa’s pregnancy were a symptom of placenta abruptio, which caregivers countered with the equivalent of orangutan bed rest.

“During the last month she and Jaya were off exhibit. It was nerve-wracking because we couldn’t get her to put her feet up, but we limited her activity as best we could.”

MAKING A BIRTH PLAN:

After the emergency C-section birth of baby Jaya in 2007, Como Zoo keepers made a detailed birth plan for Markisa’s pregnancy with partners at the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine and Fairview Hospital.

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THE BIG DAY:

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WELL BABY VISIT:

At 3.5 pounds, baby Kemala is on the small end of the orangutan growth chart, says Como Zoo senior keeper Allison Jungheim, “but she’s got a good grip, and a good set of lungs so when you’re not doing what she wants you to do she’s going to wail at you — and that’s a good thing.

All her caregivers wore these orangutan-colored fleece ponchos with loose strips attached to help teach the baby how to grip her mother’s belly.

MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION:

Seven days after surgery, Markisa had recovered sufficiently to be reunited with her baby—a record-setting reunion window that beat Como Zoo’s 12-day turn-around with baby Jaya. When mother and baby were brought together, Markisa walked around Kemala once before taking her up in her arms. “We were kind of holding our breath, but then she picked her up and as soon as she fuzzed she knew exactly where to put that baby,” says Elder, who observed successful nursing within hours of their reunion.

Fueled by a new coffee maker provided as a baby present from Como Friends, keepers kept a round-the-clock vigil for several days to ensure that a successful nursing schedule had been established. “It’s so wonderful to have zoo babies, but it’s also a lot of stress, a lot of preparation, a lot of work,” says Elder. “The one word I would use to describe it is ‘exhausting.’”

DARA AND BABY ARLENE

Western Lowland Gorilla Dara gave birth to her first offspring, a healthy five-pound female, during the evening hours of February 22. Named after Arlene Scheunemann, the long-time Como Zoo docent who helped to foster more than 200 animals in her home, baby Arlene and her mother Dara are bonding behind the scenes, and are expected to make their public debut in late March or early April. Check the next issue of Como Insider to learn more about how Como Zoo’s troop of gorillas are making way for baby.
Hop into spring with whimsical garden accessories and cuddly plush to celebrate all the new life blooming at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory this season. Como Friends members receive 15 percent off every gift shop purchase. Proceeds go toward great improvements such as the Centennial Garden coming in 2015!

Gardens at any Scale at Garden Safari Gifts

Open Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
651-487-8222

blown glass
garden art $26.99 - $51.99

fountains $34.99 - $119.99

yoga frogs lawn ornaments (many poses available)
5 inches: $6.99
11 inches: $33.99

orangutan plush
11 inches: $14.99
43 inches: $169.99