Como Insider
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inside:
The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory Now & Then
Conservation in the Classroom

Getting down to Ground Level
CARING FOR THE CHARLOTTE PARTRIDGE ORDWAY GARDEN IS ALL IN THE DETAILS
Inside this issue

Como News and Events

Como Friends Profile: A birthday wish for a bright future for Como Zoo’s large cats.

Conservatory Now & Then

One hundred years since it opened, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has evolved with the seasons—and the times.

Ground Level

Curious about the kids you’re seeing all over Como this fall? Here’s how our new Residency Programs bring classrooms right to the source.

Conservation in the Classroom

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.
A Toast to the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory

December 6, 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Tickets $100 per person

This season marks the official 100-year-anniversary of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, a milestone Como Friends will mark on December 6 with “A Toast to the Conservatory,” an evening to benefit the future of one of Minnesota’s most beloved landmarks.

“The survival and success of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has only been possible because of generations of volunteers and private donors who fought to keep it growing, and that’s a story we’re looking forward to celebrating at this capstone centennial event,” says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha. “But we’re also looking ahead to the future of the Conservatory, and ensuring that this treasure has a sustainable source of funding for its second century of service to this community.”

All proceeds from this elegant hors d’oeuvres and champagne event will benefit the Japanese Garden Endowment, a $1 million fund aimed at providing for the continued renovation and maintenance of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden, now considered one of the top examples of sansui gardens in North America. All donations made will be matched dollar for dollar up to $175,000 by a generous matching challenge grant provided by the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation.

To learn more about making a contribution, or to add your name to our guest list for December 6, contact comomembership@comofriends.org.

JOIN COMO FRIENDS IN FEBRUARY FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE ADVENTURE MEETING THE GREAT GRAY WHALES OF BAJA

February 8 – 14, 2016  •  Estimated cost of $4,200 ($3,750 if trip fills), excluding airfare

Como Friends’ February trip to see the great gray whales of Baja is filling fast, with limited space available for guests to take advantage of this six-day adventure in Mexico.

Exploring nature in groups small enough to make real conservation connections is part of the mission of Como Friends and our travel partners at Schulke Travel and Natural Habitat Adventures, named “the world’s #1 adventure travel outfitter” by the editors of Outside Magazine. Traveling in small skiffs in the San Ignacio Lagoon will allow Como Friends guests to sit low in the water—nearly eye to eye with the whales. Small groups also mean plenty of opportunities for conversation about the whales’ behavior and their habitat with the guides from Natural Habitat Adventures, the worldwide travel partner of the World Wildlife Fund. A total of 18 Como Friends travelers will stay in a unique and secluded “whale camp” within the protected confines of the El Vizcaíno UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, staying in rustic but inviting thatched cabanas on a quiet stretch of shoreline right on the lagoon’s edge.

Also included is a Como Friends exclusive experience at the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, CA. Como Friends travelers will be treated to a special behind-the-scenes tour and dinner on the roof top terrace.

To learn more, attend our upcoming Travel Program Q & A session slated for October 6th from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. Call 651-487-8229 to reserve your space, or R.S.V.P. to comomembership@comofriends.org.
Como Friends’ annual summer gala Travelers Sunset Affair set another fundraising record in July, netting over $200,000 to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. In fact, proceeds raised at this hot ticket event have grown by 144 percent in the last five years alone.

“Creating Travelers Sunset Affair is really a team effort that includes hundreds of volunteers, sponsors and donors,” says Caroline Mehlhop, Como Friends Director of Events & Sponsorships. “Thanks to their work, and guests who’ve made it a ‘must go’ event every summer, Travelers Sunset Affair has grown into the most important benefit of the year for Como Zoo and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory.*

Not only has Como Friends added seating capacity to meet the growing demand for tickets, supporters have also stepped up their contributions and volunteer time to help the event succeed. For instance, proceeds from the silent auction were up by $15,000 thanks to more than 350 businesses and individuals who donated 425 items auctioned in more than 300 packages. This year, Travelers Sunset Affair also benefited from the help of 15 sponsors, 65 patrons, and 26 vendors—most of them local businesses who see the value that Como brings to the surrounding community.

Como Friends’ supporters will see that same team effort in action at ZooBoo in October, when more than 200 costumed volunteers help to transform the campus of Como Zoo into a fun, furry and fairy-tailed adventure for young visitors during each of ZooBoo’s four nights. Como Friends’ longest-running benefit, ZooBoo has been going strong for 28 years thanks to volunteers and sponsors who help provide more than 180,000 healthy treats and novelties for young trick-or-treaters.

Como Friends ZooBoo is on October 17, 18, 24, and 25. Get your tickets today at Garden Safari gifts at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory or visit www.comofriends.org.
A LIONESS’S LEGACY LIVES ON

In February, Como Zoo keepers euthanized Wynona the lioness, who was suffering from health complications caused by her advanced age. At 22 and a half, Wynona was the second oldest zoo lion in North America, outliving the average lifespan of her wild cousins by several years. “Noni lived to a ripe old age—about 95 in cat years,” says Como Zoo keeper Marisa Paulat, who cares for two of Wynona’s adult offspring, Como Zoo’s 13-year-old male Mufasa, and 15-year-old female Savannah. “Savannah definitely takes after her mother. She’s very feisty and playful—lots of personality.”

COMO FRIENDS PROFILE: LUCY WINTERS
A birthday wish brings a bright future for Como Zoo’s large cats

In the months leading up to Lucy Winter’s sixth birthday this spring, her mother Lisa came across an article about how to turn the annual birthday party ritual into a real-life lesson about making a difference.

“We have enough toys,” says Lisa, a nurse in Blaine. “So I was intrigued when I read about an online site where kids can ask their friends to donate a portion of what they would have spent on a gift toward a good cause instead.” Lisa asked Lucy if she might be interested in trying it out, and asked her to think about what kind of charity she’d pick. “I told her she could say no, but when I presented the idea, I could see the wheels spinning,” Lisa says. A few days later, Lucy had decided exactly where she wanted to put her money. “She’d just heard about Wynona the lioness being euthanized, and she felt bad,” Lisa recalls. “In her mind, the mom lion had died, and so she wanted to make sure the ‘cubs’ were taken care of.” Together, mother and daughter started a campaign on GoFundMe.com titled “Lucy’s Birthday Wish” that asked her family and friends to consider contributing some or all of the money they might otherwise spend on Lucy’s birthday toward caring for the large cats at Como Zoo.

After making her original $50 fundraising goal in a single day, Lucy and Lisa set the bar up to $500, ultimately raising $685 from 29 donors made up of friends and family members. The Winters family committed the first $500 to Como, and spent the rest on Lucy’s one remaining birthday wish—adopting a kitten of her own from the Animal Humane Society. “Her name is Lyra Rainbow Winters,” says Lucy, who adds that she didn’t mind not receiving as many presents this year. “She hasn’t been sad at all,” says her mother. “She has a very big heart, she loves animals, and she’s excited that the lions have a good home.”

In fact, Lucy’s $500 contribution qualified the 6-year-old for full “Benefactor Level” benefits at Como Friends, which include a guided tour for six with a gardener or zookeeper. In July, Lucy chose to have a good look at the large cat exhibit, bringing her parents, little sister, and a short list of questions for zookeeper Marisa Paulat. “I had a question for the zookeeper about their paws and what they walk on,” Lucy says.

“The whole experience has surpassed that $500 mark,” says Lisa, who came to Como regularly with her own family and on school field trips. “We were hoping to teach her that birthdays are really about celebrating with your family and friends, and that there are a lot of people and animals in the world that need gifts more than we do. I hope that the memories of this are ingrained in her forever. I know she’s going to remember it more than getting a Barbie doll.”
The Sunken Garden’s seasonal flower shows have been a constant crowd-pleaser for winter-weary Minnesotans since the 1920s. This summer’s Flower Show featured Victorian plants and carpet beds that reflected the turn-of-the-century flower fashions visitors would have seen when the Conservatory first opened.

By train, trolley, bike or bus, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has been within reach to visitors from every walk of life. Today, Nice Ride bikes and shuttle buses help cut down on the carbon footprint of two million annual visitors.

Innovations in steel and glass construction techniques in the late 19th century inspired an international fashion for “glass palaces” like Como, where purple lights illuminated the historic Palm Dome’s diamond anniversary this summer.
The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory at 100

Since it opened in 1915, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory has evolved with the seasons and the times.

This summer, Como’s horticulture staff recreated the historic “palm walk” pioneered by Como’s first superintendent Frederick Nussbaumer, who believed tropical plants grown for the residents of “high northern latitudes…excite special admiration during the short summer season.”

The new Centennial Garden reflects a long history of more formalized European landscape attractions, like the 1960s era McKnight Garden.

Ninth generation Nagasaki landscape architect Masami Matsuda (top-center) drew up the designs for what is now the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden. Once overgrown and in disrepair, Matsuda-san’s original vision for the sansui garden is reemerging today, thanks to an ongoing renovation led by John Powell, an internationally recognized Japanese garden expert, and the continued investment of Como Friends. Thank you!
Taking care of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden is all in the details

When Adam Strehlow took on a new role as lead gardener of The Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden two years ago, he was determined to learn Japanese to decipher the many foreign terms and concepts he was encountering in the garden every day. “But that lasted about two weeks,” Strehlow says with a laugh. “I realized the language is super difficult and I needed to focus my energy on the garden.”

Luckily, Strehlow has a personal mentor to help him translate the meaning and the essence of Japanese gardening—John Powell, an internationally-regarded Japanese garden expert based in Texas. Over the last three years, private contributions from Como Friends have made it possible to bring Powell to St. Paul several times a year to provide consultation on the garden’s ongoing restoration and hands-on training to horticultural staff.

“I can’t even describe the awe that people in the Japanese garden world have when I say I’m working with John Powell,” Strehlow says. “He’s the keynote speaker at every conference, with everyone calling for his attention, and I get to work with him one-on-one three or four times a year. You can’t get this quality of mentorship anywhere outside of Japan, and it’s really integral to the future of the garden.”

Trained as an arborist with a Masters in urban forestry, Strehlow was new to the aesthetic and cultural traditions of Japanese gardening when he began his mentorship with Powell. “One of the first things John told me was to forget everything you think you know about horticulture as it applies in this garden,” he says. “Up on the zoo grounds or in the gardens it might be relevant, but down here you almost have to start from scratch.”

It’s all in the details

One major difference in horticultural style immediately apparent to visitors is the shape and scale of the trees, which had become overgrown and out of balance in the decade before The Ordway Gardens was built. “In western horticulture, you’d rarely prune more than 25 percent of a tree’s branches, but Japanese gardening takes a really aggressive approach to pruning,” he says. “Every single winter we’re pruning those pine trees, taking away half if not more. But because of the TLC the plants are receiving, they end up responding really well.”

If you get down to ground level in the garden, you may notice another small detail common in Japanese gardens—beneficial bugs that patrol the garden for pests. Last September, Bartlett’s Tree Service donated more than 10,000 Japanese lady beetles, green lacewings, mite predators and moth egg parasites for release in the garden, augmenting the naturally existing population of beneficial bugs that prey on aphids, weevils and other plant pests.

This integrated pest management approach cuts the need for pesticides, and helps encourage pollinators and other beneficial insects. A year after the insect
Japanese lady beetles prey on plant lice, helping to prevent the need for pesticide use. (above) Horticultural staff give young Como visitors a close-up view of beneficial bugs. (right) Bartlett Tree Expert Jon Heaton shakes beneficial insects over the outdoor Bonsai collection. Though green lacewings prefer to feed on aphids, “they gave Adam and me some pretty wicked bites that day,” says Heaton, who donated more than 10,000 insects for release at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory and Tropical Encounters.

Making a difference: To mark the centennial of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, Como Friends is leading a campaign to create a $1 million endowment for the continued care and restoration of the Japanese Garden. Every contribution made toward the endowment will be matched dollar for dollar up to $175,000 by a generous matching challenge grant from the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of The Saint Paul Foundation.

Mrs. Katherine (Kitty) Andersen was a fan of the Japanese Garden at Como and enjoyed sitting for long stretches to enjoy its beauty. Katherine B. Andersen Fund trustees tell us she would be pleased to support efforts to ensure another 100 years of its care and maintenance. To learn more about the endowment, or for an invitation to Como Friends’ upcoming “Toast to the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory” on December 6, please email comomembership@comofriends.org.
A Day in the Life of Como’s Residency Program

SUMMER SCHOOL: Area teachers come to Como for a special summer training session to find out what to expect when their students relocate to Como for a full week of cross-disciplinary learning. Teachers tell us they love the chance to connect and collaborate with Como’s own education specialists who direct most of the day’s Residency Program lessons: “I learned just as much as my students! To learn alongside them added to the adventure and camaraderie,” said one teacher.

DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE: This colorful Como bus arrives every day during the Residency Program to shuttle students from school grounds to Como for a full-day of super-charged field trip learning. Last year, 633 students, 161 parent chaperones, and 64 educators took part in the program. One second-grader told us, “When I first got onto the Como bus, I was WOWED!”

On your next visit to Como, don’t be surprised if you run into a second grade scientist identifying rainforest plants in Tropical Encounters, or a third-grade field researcher observing polar bears in the Arctic tundra. They’re all part of Como’s new Residency Program, which kicked off a second season this fall, bringing more than 600 area elementary school students to Como for a full week of immersive conservation education. Launched last year with funding from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund and supported with private funds from Como Friends, this innovative new program is already a hit with students, teachers, and parents who tell us it’s helping kids connect the dots between people, plants and animals. Here’s a look at how it works:
LEARNING TO THINK LIKE A SCIENTIST:
Taking notes as polar bears play, comparing and contrasting plant characteristics, and considering life from the different points of view of predators and prey are all part of a typical day for Residency Program students. “We talk a lot about observation, and how that fits into the scientific method,” says Sarah Olson, residency coordinator. When they arrive, all students take a pre-test to find out how much they already know, then head out on a scavenger hunt through the grounds of the Como Zoo and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory “so they can see everything that we’re going to learn about over the next week.”

MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO?: One popular lesson plan takes students to the Primate Building, where they observe spider monkeys, make a hypothesis to predict how the animals will respond to enrichment items, then watch what the monkeys actually do. “I have noticed my students talking about the Como program even now that we’re back to school,” one teacher told us. “My students are able to use scientific language in everyday conversations.”

WORKING LUNCH: Even lunch is an opportunity for students to learn about cutting down on their carbon footprint by recycling, composting, avoiding unnecessary packaging and even eating that extra bite of apple. “One classroom actually got their lunch waste down to less than two pounds,” Olson reports. “That’s pretty impressive.”

TAKING THE PLUNGE: Hands-on learning stations like this help students experience some of the harsh realities animals and plants in the tundra face every day. Here, a student compares how the icy water feels with a bare hand compared to one plunged into a “polar bear mitt” of insulating lard.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Your support for Como Friends has been critical to helping this cutting-edge conservation education program grow by providing Como’s talented team of education specialists the support necessary to provide this new program to the schools that depend on Como’s free admission. “This week was an absolute blast,” one grateful teacher told us. “It was so engaging and students learned so much. This will be an experience that they will remember for the rest of their lives. I still have students saying, ‘I wish we could go back to Como Zoo.’”

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Please Recycle

Make your Holiday Gifts Count Double this Year!

Garden Safari Gifts is operated by Como Friends, so every purchase you make helps the plants and animals at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory thrive.

LOCATION
Visitor Center at Como Park
Zoo & Conservatory
651.487.8222

HOURS
Daily 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Take home a memory with a handcrafted conservatory ornament.
Hand-painted Ball $19.99

Keep your claws and paws cozy with Adult Polar Bear Slippers
$16.99

Kids' Como Zoo Hoodie $16.99
Kids' Polar Bear Slippers $16.99