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.

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.

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.

Como Friends’ New Website

Zoo Baby Update

Blooming Butterflies

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Membership & Donations: 651-487-8229
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How to reach us
24-hour information: 651-487-8200
Visitor Services: 651-487-8201
Education Department: 651-487-8272
Garden Safari Gifts: 651-487-8222

Graphic Design:
Matt Wehner
Editor:
Laura Billings Coleman

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Travelers Sunset Affair: Sundown on the Savanna

“Sundown on the Savanna” is more than the theme of Como Friends’ next Travelers Sunset Affair slated for July 21. It’s also what’s in store for the winning bidder of one of our biggest super silent auction trips yet — a seven-day safari trip to Zimbabwe donated by Pique Travel. Como Zoo’s own African animals will be the featured players in this year’s summer gala, which will showcase our gentle herd of giraffes at their new public feeding station. Tickets to the Como Friends’ summer gala go on sale soon. Visit comofriends.org for more details.

Sponsor an animal on April 20

Tune in to Como Friends’ KSTP 5 Eyewitness News Phone-a-Thon

Be sure to sponsor your favorite Como animal or garden during Como Friends’ upcoming KSTP 5 Eyewitness News Phone-a-Thon on April 20. This annual fundraising event hosted by our partners at KSTP 5 Eyewitness News will showcase some of the amazing animals and gorgeous gardens that benefit from Como Friends’ sponsorship programs. Great deals on favorite sponsorship packages will be offered throughout the day. “Every animal sponsorship package comes with a plush animal toy, which makes it a fun way to support Como in a way that really connects with kids. The Sponsorship program is very popular with parents and grandparents because it’s a gift that also gives back to a place that families really love,” says Laurel Lundberg, Como Friends’ Director of Individual Giving. Watch for your April Como Promo for a run-down of sponsorship deals, and tune in to KSTP 5 Eyewitness News on April 20 to show your support!
A New Look for Our Website

We’ve redesigned our website at comofriends.org, rolling out a mobile responsive site this winter that’s focused on the powerful impact your private contributions make at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory every day.

“We know that more and more of our donors are connecting with the mission of Como Friends through their smartphones and other mobile devices, so creating a website that’s built around the way people give was important to our work,” says Matthew Wehner, Como Friends’ Graphic Design and Brand Manager.

The new site allows supporters to r.s.v.p and buy tickets to special events, learn more about high priority projects Como Friends is funding, and go behind the scenes with “impact features” that explore how Como Friends’ public/private partnership is helping to protect what our community loves about Como, from free admission, to school field trips, to updates on the animals and plants at Como.

Bookmark comofriends.org to stay up to date on everything your contributions make possible at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

SIGN UP TODAY!

Como Friends has launched an online communications tool that makes it easy for us to connect supporters with the Como stories you care about most. When you visit our website you’ll see a “Sign Up” option in the main menu, directly right of “Give.” Just click it, fill out the quick form and submit.

By creating an account, you’ll have access to your giving history with Como Friends, information about supporter Special Access Events and more. Everyone who signs up through May 1 will be eligible for a drawing for a $50 Target gift card. Thanks!
Como Friends Profile: Bruce Beltt

A retired psychologist left his entire estate to Como Friends, protecting the legacy of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory’s free admission.

Como Friends’ Planned Giving program makes it possible for supporters to provide for the animals and plants at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory through their own estate planning. “Over the years, we’ve encouraged supporters to make their plans known, so that we have the chance to thank them for their gifts and support,” says Como Friends president Jackie Sticha.

But last year, one very generous donation came as a complete surprise, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Bruce Beltt, a retired psychologist in St. Peter, Minnesota. With no children or family ties when he died in July at the age of 73, he left his entire estate in the care of Como Friends, bequeathing nearly $475,000 toward “zoo improvements and care of the zoo animals.”

Beltt specified, “It is my preference that the proceeds from my estate be used to maintain public access to the zoo free of admission charges or fees, but also secondarily, to support education of children on biological evolution, diversity and habitat importance.”

One improvement likely to benefit from Beltt’s gift is the new Seal and Sea Lion exhibit, a progressive new habitat for Sparky and the other pinnipeds to be funded through public bonding and matched private contributions secured by Como Friends. Since 2000, Como Friends has benefited from many more gifts made through the Planned Giving program, some from well-known supporters who wanted to leave a lasting legacy, and others from unacknowledged fans like Beltt, who was born in Cloquet in a Finnish-speaking household. The oldest of seven children, Beltt earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Chicago and received a PhD in Psychology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Dr. Beltt taught at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York and later became Chief Psychologist at the St. Peter State Hospital in Minnesota.

“It’s a testament to the memories people make here at Como that they want to see it preserved and protected for the next generation,” says Sticha. “We’re sorry that we never had a chance to know Dr. Beltt and thank him in person, but we feel very honored to be chosen as the stewards for such a generous gift that will benefit the animals at Como Zoo and the visitors who care about them.”

Contact Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving, if you’d like to include Como Friends in your estate. She can be reached at 651-487-8296 or laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org.

Beer and Cheer

Como Friends’ Bouquets fundraiser on February 25 was another sold-out success, welcoming 450 guests and a record 14 restaurant sponsors. Cook St. Paul, Hola Arepa and Tamarack Tap Room provided exclusive tastings for the unique VIP Experience in Gorilla Forest, where the gorilla “enrichment” session included live harp music from Terri Tacheny. Our lively beer garden also grew this year to include eight stations for sampling craft beers and cold brew coffee. Thanks to your support, Como Friends’ Bouquets raised more than $25,000 to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.
Thank You!
Como Friends supporters are invited to enjoy a special access preview of Como Zoo’s new giraffe feeding station in September. Watch your mail for an invite this summer, look for our update in the Como Promo, or visit our events page at comofriends.org for more information.

Face to Face:
The new giraffe feeding station is finally here
Full grown reticulated giraffes can reach to the height of a second story window, but that doesn’t mean they can’t be overlooked. In fact, until recently, very little research existed on the unusual biology and complex social behaviors of the world’s tallest land mammal — a trend that’s shifting now as conservation researchers are starting to take the full measure of these gentle giants.

“The wild population of giraffes has dropped by 40 percent in the last 15 years, so it’s important that giraffes are finally having their moment in the spotlight,” says Como Zoo hoofstock keeper Adam Nigon. “They really are amazing, iconic animals that people should get to know more about.”

Como Zoo’s two million annual visitors will soon have that chance with the opening of a new giraffe feeding station set to open on May 21st. Part of a two-year facelift that’s transformed both the interior and exterior of the historic African hoofstock habitats, the new design includes a public platform that will be the focal point for keeper talks and a feeding station that will bring the public face-to-face with Como Zoo’s herd. The improvement was made possible by funding from Minnesota’s Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund with matched private contributions secured by Como Friends.

Last fall, as construction wrapped up, Como Zoo’s giraffe herd took some tentative steps toward trying out the new attraction. “Pretty much everything in the wild wants to eat them so giraffes are very cautious in general,” says Nigon. One exception to the rule is Skeeter, Como’s 6-year-old male, who put his nose right into the public feeding station for a healthy treat of crispy romaine lettuce. “But Skeeter is very gregarious for a giraffe, very outgoing.”

This spring, Nigon and the other keepers will be working to reinforce the positive first experiences the giraffes have had in their new multi-species terrain, introducing them to Ulysses the zebra and ostriches Pickles and Olive. “In the past, they were all separated into their own enclosures, but now they’ll be able to share a much larger space, just as they would in the wild,” says Nigon. “They’re not animals that would compete with each other for food, so we expect the transition to go pretty well.”

While Nigon expects giraffe cows Daisy and Clover to be a little stand-offish with the public this summer, he predicts that Skeeter will quickly become a crowd favorite. “The biggest reason these animals are here is to be an ambassador for their species, so having Skeeter out there and getting him comfortable with the public can help visitors get excited about giraffes,” says Nigon. “That little bond people feel with our herd really does a tremendous thing for their wild relatives. If Skeeter can spark someone to really want to do more to conserve these animals in the wild, then he’s really done his job.”
Orangutan Kemala

“I thought Jaya was fearless but Kemala is even more so,” primate keeper Megan Elder says about the orangutan troop’s newest member. “She was climbing all over, and instigating play with keepers pretty early on. She regularly tries to get her brother Jaya to play with her, pulling his hair and biting his ears. She’s totally fearless.”

Kemala takes part in a training session every day to teach her how to recognize her own name, and to desensitize her to hypodermic needles—a behavior that will come in handy when the orangutans get their annual flu shots.

A year old in January, Kemala will still be “considered an infant for a good three to four years,” Elder says, while her next door neighbor Arlene’s infancy will last two to three years. Though Kemala and Arlene may look and act a little like toddlers, “their development is so different, you really can’t compare them to humans. “Expect to see her start exploring her outdoor habitat this spring, rope-swinging with brother Jaya. “We’ll have to keep an eye out to make sure he’s not too rambunctious with her, but she’s tough and very playful. She’ll be a lot of fun to watch.”
Gorilla Arlene

Little Arlene celebrated her first birthday on February 22, and is starting to show signs of greater independence. “She’s becoming a little more adventurous,” says primate keeper Geoff Jungheim, who says Arlene sat up and toddled away from her mother Dara during a recent training session with the western lowland gorillas. “It’s not conducive to training, but it sure is cute.”

A first-time mother, Dara is cautious about being too far from her baby, but recently allowed troop mate Alice to spend some quality time with baby Arlene. “Dara’s a little bit of a helicopter parent, but she’s getting more and more comfortable with letting Arlene explore a little,” says Jungheim. First-time father Schroeder is far less “hands on,” vocalizing in a grumbling way recently when Arlene came by to give him a curious poke. “He was never one of the most playful of the bachelors at Como—he likes his naps and he likes to eat,” says Jungheim.

Tamarin Twins

Emperor Tamarin parents Lara and Roger welcomed two new tamarins to their family, a boy and a girl born on January 27. Visitors who attended the Valentine’s weekend “Woo at the Zoo” event voted to choose their new names—Luke and Leia. The twins weighed just 40 grams each at birth—a size that zoo keeper Tami Murphy compares to a “snack-sized Snickers bar.” When fully grown, they’ll weigh about one pound, and have the distinctive mustache of the South American emperor tamarin.
Como Friends provided $75,000 in private funding to bring back the popular teaching garden.

“We hope ‘Blooming Butterflies’ inspires people to consider some pollinator-friendly solutions in their own backyards.” – Jackie Sticha
“Blooming Butterflies” is coming back to Como, and the timing couldn’t be better.

As conservation challenges to butterfly populations continue to make headlines this spring, Como’s keepers and horticulturists are reviving this popular interpretive garden to bring even more attention to the profound intersections between pollinators, plants and people.

“The decline of the monarch butterfly is one of the conservation challenges that Minnesotans really care about," says Susie Van Blaircom, Como’s Education and Conservation Curator. In the mid-90s, an estimated one billion monarchs migrated annually across the United States—a number that fell to just 33 million in 2014. While their numbers are beginning to rebound, the continued loss of habitat has prompted some conservationists to call for the insects to be added to the Endangered Species List. “Blooming Butterflies will introduce visitors to flying insects and plants from around the world in a way that showcases the incredible diversity of butterflies and moths, and calls attention to the importance of preserving these ‘beneficial bugs.’ Minnesotans can make a difference in the recovery of the monarch butterfly by planting native milkweed. Even a small outdoor space can become a sanctuary for monarchs. “

Como Friends provided $75,000 through gifts from supporters to bring back the popular teaching garden, which was open during the 2008-2010 summer seasons. Since 2011, the enclosed garden space has been the home of Como’s Edible Garden, an interpretive garden focused on the vegetables, vines, and fruits that thrive in Minnesota’s growing conditions. “The Edible Garden inspired a lot of visitors to go home and start gardening themselves," says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. “Now we hope ‘Blooming Butterflies’ inspires people to consider some pollinator-friendly solutions in their own backyards."

**PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS**

Planting milkweed in your garden is just the start of improving habitat for monarchs and other pollinators.

**Don’t mind the mess:** Butterfly chrysalises and eggs of some species overwinter in plant debris, so save your spring time clean up—and a few caterpillars—until the weather is consistently warm.

**Keep on the sunny side:** Make sure to site your pollinator garden in a location that gets plenty of sun—at least 3 to 4 hours daily. The good lighting encourages healthy plant growth, lots of flowers, and makes it easier for butterflies and bees to spot flowers.

**Go native:** Native Minnesota plants such as purple coneflower, purple wild asters, and Joe-Pye weed are attractive to monarchs and easy to grow and maintain. Mixing them up with colorful non-native annuals like zinnias, cosmos, and purpletop vervain will also help attract pollinators.

**Nurture nectar:** Monarchs can’t survive without milkweed for their reproduction, but adults feed on nectar from numerous flower sources—especially daisy-shaped blooms like coneflowers, sunflowers, and asters. Open compost piles—or even a small plate of rotting bananas—can also help attract some sap feeding butterfly species.

**What’s the Buzz?**

Como’s Blooming Butterflies garden returns this season with even more tips about preserving the pollinators in your own backyard.

As a Como Friends Supporter, you can be the first to welcome back “Blooming Butterflies” at a special access preview of the exhibit slated for Thursday, June 16, 2016, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Visit the events page on our new website at comofriends.org to learn more. R.S.V.Ps required.
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

Spring Renewal

Garden Safari Gifts is a gardener’s delight this season with recycled Spring Flower Show bulbs, gorgeous Conservatory-grown plants, and garden accessories galore.

Stop in to see Como Friends’ remodeled gift shop and support the plants and animals you love with every purchase.