RARE BREED: INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO SAVE A SPECIES
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!

Summer Hours (April 1 – September 30) 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Winter Hours (October 1 – March 31) 10 a.m. – 4 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.

SPONSOR AN ANIMAL ON APRIL 4

Help provide the “extra care and feeding” for your favorite Como animals and gardens during Como Friends’ Phone-a-Thon Tuesday, April 4. This annual fundraising event hosted by our partners at KSTP-TV 5 Eyewitness News will showcase some of the amazing animals and gorgeous gardens that benefit from Como Friends’ sponsorship program. “The Phone-a-Thon is a great way for Como lovers to see our animal ambassadors and to support Como—one of our great Minnesota treasures,” says Laurel Lundberg, Como Friends’ Director of Individual Giving. With specially-priced animal sponsorship packages—each with its own plush—it’s also a fun way to teach kids about the gift of giving back to their community.

Watch for your April Como Promo email for a rundown of sponsorship deals. Tune in to KSTP-TV 5 Eyewitness News on April 4 to show your support for Como!

Bouquets guests enjoyed a rare after-dark glimpse of the Winter Flower Show.

Mike Wilhelmi and Susan Roeder enjoying the VIP reception in Gorilla Forest.

Dave Kuennen of BrightWines shares his wine expertise with a guest.

A spirited night TO BENEFIT COMO

Como Friends’ Bouquets served up another delicious sampling of the Twin Cities’ best restaurants, fine wines and microbrews on February 23, welcoming a crowd of 400 guests. Sponsored by Berger Transfer, this annual food and wine-tasting event gave visitors a rare after-dark glimpse of the Sunken Garden’s Winter Flower Show, featured more than 100 specially-selected wines, and provided VIP guests an exclusive experience in Gorilla Forest. A new “Growler Toss” attraction in the Como Beer Garden brought out the competitive spirit among Como Friends supporters, who helped to raise a record amount at Bouquets.

Como News and Events
Spring 2017
Did you know that leaving your car at home and taking public transit every day can help cut 4,800 pounds of carbon emissions from the air every year? Take home more tips about cutting your carbon footprint while you “Party for the Planet” at Como on Earth Day weekend. Presented by Xcel Energy, this special conservation weekend features craft stations, story times, and family-friendly games all focused on 2017’s Earth Day theme of environmental and climate literacy. The conservation network Monarch Watch will also be on hand, helping visitors to make “seed bombs” full of plantings to attract and protect Monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

Hubbard Broadcasting and Como Zoo have a long history of partnership, dating back to the 1950s when broadcasting pioneer Stanley E. Hubbard helped to find Sparky the Sea Lion’s traveling show a permanent home in St. Paul. That connection continues today through Como Friends’ Animal and Garden Sponsorship, which is about to be the featured fundraiser during a KSTP-TV S Eyewitness News Phone-a-Thon on April 4. Throughout the day, a full phone bank of volunteers will be on hand during all of KSTP’s news programs to help callers sign up to sponsor the care and feeding of their favorite animals at Como Zoo (including the magnificent pair of young snow leopards featured on page 6).

Como Friends Insider talked to Joe Johnston, Director of Public Affairs, S Eyewitness News and 4STV, to find out more about what it means to support Minnesota’s most visited cultural institution.

Hubbard Broadcasting has been a major supporter of Como Zoo since at least 1956, when Stanley E. Hubbard helped start the Sparky tradition, and it’s continued ever since, with support for major improvements like Polar Bear Odyssey and the Visitor Center. What accounts for that 60-year connection?

We’re a locally-owned and operated TV station, and the community we serve is of the utmost importance to us. Besides delivering the news, we also want to connect with our community and Como Zoo is a great place to do that. It’s a great urban zoo, one of the last free zoos in the country, and we want to make sure that every family in Minnesota gets a chance to visit. It’s one of those Minnesota memories that everyone has if you grew up here—I went there as a kid, and then I took my kids, and now I’m taking my grandchildren. It’s one of those places that makes families feel connected, and you want to keep those traditions going.

In addition to the Como Friends’ Phone-a-Thon on April 4, S Eyewitness News also sponsors fundraising events like ZooBoo and Sunset Affair, and special partnership opportunities at Como. How does supporting Como help you connect with your own audience?

It’s a tremendous gathering place right in the center of the Twin Cities, and people of all ages and backgrounds feel welcome there. Como Park Zoo and Conservatory attracts even more visitors than the Minnesota State Fair, so it’s allowed us to do different events there throughout the year. In the past, we’ve sponsored health fairs there, and we always welcomed us to do partnerships, and it’s been a great place for us to connect with our viewers in person.

What’s your favorite Como story?

I always want to know if there are new baby animals being born—everyone loves those stories. But it’s also been fun to watch the development of Como over the last decade or so. Tropical Encounters just celebrated its 10th anniversary, but I remember when the plans for that were just taking shape, so it’s gratifying to see an organization expand to serve the community better. With Gorilla Forest, and the other improvements Como Friends has been part of—that impact is impressive.

Como’s animal ambassadors are occasional visitors to your TV studio. Who’s your favorite?

The sloth. Who doesn’t love Chloe the sloth?
Snow leopards range across two million square miles of wild habitat and twelve countries, but very few human beings will ever encounter one face to face. Reclusive and crepuscular, these magnificent cats live in the shadows of mountain ranges from Afghanistan to China to Mongolia, making it a challenge for researchers to know just how many of these endangered cats still survive in the wild. Current estimates from the Snow Leopard Trust suggest that there may be as few as 3,900 wild snow leopards left in the world.

That’s why zoos from Europe to North America are joining forces to protect the genetic health and diversity of the roughly 600 snow leopards cared for in zoos. Thanks to a series of new breeding recommendations made by the Snow Leopard Species Survival Plan committee, Como Zoo is now the new home to two young European-born snow leopards who arrived in St. Paul this winter.

Their transatlantic travel plan required nearly 10 hours of air travel and countless hours of coordination with zookeepers in Germany, France, and the United States. Male snow leopard Moutig was born in April 2013 in Brittany at the Zooparc de Trégomeur in France. Como Zoo commissioned this custom-made traveling crate in France for his more than 4,000 mile journey from Paris to Chicago in January. Como Zookeepers were waiting at U.S. Customs to sign on the dotted line for Moutig, who made the rest of the journey by car. They returned a few weeks later to collect Alya, a two-year-old snow leopard sent from Tierpark Zoo in Berlin, Germany.
large cats to participate in their own health care," Kelly says about Como’s operant conditioning training program. “Our cats will open their mouths and present their hips for voluntary vaccinations—the sorts of behaviors you could never train your house cat to cooperate with.”

Moutig, the three-year-old male, made his public debut in February, leaping around the rock formations and vocalizing at the lions he can see from his habitat. His partner, Alya, born May 2014, is expected to make the move outdoors later this spring, and if nature takes its course, the pair could have cubs as early as 2018.

“What’s going to be fun about this particular pair of cats is that they’re so young and playful,” says Kelly. “Moutig especially is a very curious cat—visitors are going to love watching him leap.”

COMING SOON
A Remodeled Habitat for Como Zoo’s Large Cats

If you like the new look of Como Zoo’s African Hoofstock habitat, you’re going to love the face-lift Como’s got planned for the Large Cats look-out near the west end of the zoo grounds. Starting after Labor Day 2017, Como will begin construction on a “face-lift” of the habitat, with design features aimed at bringing visitors just a little closer to Como’s large cats. With engaging new climbing rocks seated right by the windows, “tree stump” seating for small groups, and even a “Safari Jeep” that projects right into one of the large cat enclosures, Como Friends President Jackie Sticha says, “each update is really about creating a more immersive and educational experience for our core audience of young families and field trip groups.” Like the recent make-over in Como Zoo’s Primate Building, the Large Cats building will also include improved lighting, sound dampening panels, and new artwork, interpretive stations, and naturalistic murals that will immerse visitors in the sights and sounds of Siberian tigers, African lions, Central Asian snow leopards, and American cougars that all inhabit Como Zoo’s historic large cat building. This phase of the facelift is being funded 100% with donations from Como Friends supporters and zoo visitors. To learn more, or to make a contribution to the project, visit www.comofriends.org.

WHAT EVERY LARGE CAT WANTS THIS SPRING
Celebrate Earth Day with Enrichment Gifts from Como Friends’ Wish List

Kids can be tough on their toys, but a Siberian tiger is a lot tougher. “Our animal enrichment items can definitely get clawed, chomped and ‘loved to death,’” says Como Zoo senior keeper Allison Jungheim. “We can go through a lot of plastic kiddie pools.”

To keep up—and to help celebrate Earth Day on April 22—Como Friends teamed up with Como Zoo’s team of zookeepers to create a customized wish list full of creative ideas for keeping Como Zoo’s animals healthy and curious all season long. From the $500 boomer ball polars, which can jump as far as 50 feet, Connor and St. Paul across language barriers. “This was really a three-year process, with so much paperwork and so many details to work out in multiple languages, that it’s remarkable that it all went so well,” says Como Zoo senior keeper and animal registrar Jo Kelly. “Thank goodness for Google Translate.”

With genetic lines not well represented outside of Europe, the pair were part of a trio of young snow leopards selected for placement in North America through a rigorous selection process that attracted applications from zoos around the country. Como Zoo was eventually chosen to receive the breeding pair, while a third snow leopard went to the Milwaukee Zoo. Minnesota’s cold climate played a part in the selection, but so did Como Zoo’s 60-year history raising and breeding these endangered cats. “We’ve had snow leopards at Como as far back as 1957, with twelve births, and a lot of success getting
ALWAYS GROWING

Creating the eternal spring you’ll see this season in the Sunken Garden is a year-round effort.

No matter what day you come to see the Spring Flower Show at the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s Sunken Garden, Como horticultural supervisor Paul Knuth wants it to feel like that first perfect day in May.

“The Sunken Garden team grows the crops to be in full bloom and at their peak at the same moment,” says Knuth, the horticultural mastermind behind more than 150 seasonal shows at Como. To make Minnesota’s most beautiful room look just like Mother Nature on her best day requires more than a year of strategizing that started even before last spring’s flower show was finished. “We evaluate every show and take careful notes on things like whether the tulips came in too fast, or if the pansies came in too slow, and then plan the next year’s show accordingly, with a totally different theme and color palette,” he says.

While the focus of each seasonal show features many perennial picks—bulbs for winter, spring and summer, and ornamental grasses for fall—Como horticulturists also seek out brand new varieties that visitors may not have seen before, like the warm gold Poinsettias that lined the reflecting pool in the 2016 Holiday Flower Show. “We want each show to be on the cutting edge of ornamental floriculture,” he says. “The idea is really to inspire people to search out and try the newest products. We want visitors to see what’s possible in ornamental horticulture.”

The costliest and most labor-intensive of the Conservatory’s botanical displays, the Sunken Garden depends on a regular team of volunteers who help with the tear-down process between shows, and who spend two hours every morning pulling dried leaves and fading blooms from flower beds before visitors arrive at 10 a.m. “Volunteers really help the whole room sparkle,” Knuth says.

Meanwhile, Como’s horticultural teams tend to a year-round schedule that accounts for the different dormancy, growth and bloom times for each of the plants that will appear in a given show. For instance, hydrangea plugs take several months under the greenhouse glass to grow large enough for display, while the first flight of tulips seen at the Flower Show’s opening on March 18 were pulled out of refrigerated dormancy just a month before. As each stem grows, Knuth and his team keep a careful eye on the calendar. “For instance, if the tulips are growing too fast they won’t last on display, so we’ll put them back in refrigeration to slow their progress,” he says.

While many botanical gardens around the country have abandoned this turn-of-the-century flower show tradition in favor of permanent plant collections, Knuth says Como’s Sunken Garden roots may go too deep into Minnesota’s seasonal survival tool kit for it to ever go away. The arrival of spring in Minnesota can be unpredictable, he says, “so visitors really seem to look forward to this Flower Show. It’s a sign of things to come.”

By far the most labor intensive of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s rotating flower shows, the Spring Flower Show requires more than 10,000 spring bulbs. During the course of the show’s five week run, the tulips, hyacinth and daffodils will be planted and replaced three times and the crocus will be replaced five times to make sure each flower is at its peak.

Visitor traffic can be tough on the plants, so Como horticulturists grow plenty of replacements. The Holiday Flower Show suffers from the most plant casualties, as winter coats brush up against and break delicate Poinsettias. The tropical plants also require the highest greenhouse temperatures, requiring the Sunken Garden to stay between 65F degrees at night and 80F degrees during the day throughout the show’s holiday run.

Knuth says the Sunken Garden team has enjoyed the unseasonal weather in recent years, allowing them to push in the room. The Sunken Garden staff continually play around with choosing vibrant colors to dazzle our visitors.” This season’s Spring Flower Show is a sunny mix of pinks and yellows, colors Minnesotans crave after a dreary winter.

While the color trend-watchers at Pantone picked “Greenery” as the color of 2017, Knuth says, “green usually makes up about fifty percent of flowering plants’ color, so it’s not a color we need to push in the room. The Sunken Garden staff continually play around with choosing vibrant colors to dazzle our visitors.” This season’s Spring Flower Show is a sunny mix of pinks and yellows, colors Minnesotans crave after a dreary winter.

Without Como’s behind-the-scenes growing range, it would be impossible to grow and stage the Sunken Garden’s five seasonal flower shows. Seeds, bulbs, plugs, and plants bound for the Sunken Garden take up more than 20,000 square feet of space—roughly two-thirds of Como’s entire greenhouse operations.

Mark Your Calendar
The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s Spring Flower Show is on display March 18–April 23. The Summer Flower Show, the longest-running seasonal show, comes into bloom April 29–October 1.
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

GARDEN SAFARI GIFTS

Purrr-fect Gifts for Large Cat Lovers
From cuddly cat plush to tiger tees, now's the season to wear your love of Como Zoo's large cats "with pride." Remember, Como Friends members enjoy 15 percent off every purchase!

LOCATION
Visitor Center at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory

PHONE: 651.487.8222
HOURS: Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.