

C O M O F R I E N D S

INSIDER

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Reconnecting to Conservation

From online learning options, to on-site animal training, Como is helping kids and families reconnect to the wonders of nature

Photo by Susannah Baudhuin

GIVE TO THE MAX FOR COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY ON NOVEMBER 17!

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A NIGHT TO REMEMBER AT SUNSET AFFAIR



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como friends
THRIVE ON

1225 Estabrook Drive | St. Paul, MN 55103 | 651.487.8229
www.comofriends.org | comomembership@comofriends.org



Como Friends is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to inspire community generosity in support of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory so it thrives for generations to come.

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COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY

1225 Estabrook Drive | St. Paul, MN 55103
www.comozooconservatory.org

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory's mission is to inspire our public to value the presence of living things in our lives.

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.



DIRECTOR/CAMPUS MANAGER OF
COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY: Michelle Furrer

COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY
PLEASE VISIT COMOZOOCONSERVATORY.ORG
FOR RESERVATIONS

Winter Hours: (October 1–March 31) 10 am–4 pm
Summer Hours: (April 1–September 30) 10 am–6 pm

COMO FRIENDS INSIDER

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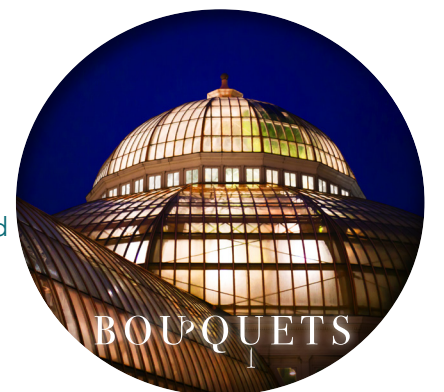


Fans of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory came together to “Discover Como” all over again at Como Friends’ Sunset Affair summer gala held in July. With plenty of room to roam, and an amazing new amphitheater for enjoying a special Sparky show, Sunset Affair guests gathered together to raise funds in support of Como’s free admission, world-class care for plants and animals, and conservation and education programs.

Mark your calendars for Sunset Affair 2023 to be held on July 20th.

SAVE THE DATE FOR COMO FRIENDS’ BOUQUETS | FEBRUARY 23

Imagine a moonlit winter night where warmth and wine mingle beneath Como’s iconic Palm Dome. The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is the magical backdrop for Bouquets, Como Friends’ annual fundraiser featuring wine, beer and food that supports the treasured community gathering space. Watch your inbox this season for ticket information for the midwinter escape everyone looks forward to most!



HOW TO REACH US

Como Friends: 651.487.8229 | **Membership & Donations:** 651.487.8229 | **Garden Safari Gifts:** 651.487.8222
Como Park Zoo & Conservatory: 24-hour Information: 651.487.8200 | **Visitor Services:** 651.487.8201
Education Department: 651.487.8272 | **Volunteer Services:** 651.487.8252 | **Rentals:** 651.487.8250

NEW WEBSITE COMING SOON! This season, we’re redesigning comofriends.org to be even more accessible and informative, with an emphasis on great images and storytelling, highlighting what your support makes possible every day at Minnesota’s most visited cultural institution. Be sure to bookmark comofriends.org to stay up to date on all things Como, and check out our new look, coming soon!

COMO NEWS & EVENTS



GIVE TO THE MAX FOR COMO PARK ZOO AND CONSERVATORY ON NOVEMBER 17 *Join us on Give to the Max Day for Minnesota's great day of giving!*

Support Como Friends on Give to the Max Day and help sustain the community treasure generations of Minnesotans know and love.

Your gift provides the funding Como needs to plan for the future—from animal habitat and garden improvements to conservation initiatives and education programs that connect visitors to the wonders of nature.

Your support transforms visitors' experience with animals, plants, and conservation, keeps Como at the cutting edge of zoos and botanical gardens, and provides admission-free access to all.

Go to <https://www.givemn.org/organization/Como-Friends> to make an impact at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory with your Give to the Max Day gift.

Stay tuned for more details starting November 1 by signing up for email updates and following Como Friends on Facebook.



Leave a Legacy

Learn more about what your planned gift can make possible today and tomorrow.

Include Como Friends in your estate plan and keep Como Park Zoo and Conservatory's animals and beautiful gardens growing and thriving for future generations and ensure Como remains admission free and accessible to all.

For more information contact Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving, at 651-487-8296 or laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org

COMO NEWS & EVENTS



PRESERVING COMO'S GREENHOUSES

With more than 30,000 feet of growing space, one and a half acres of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is entirely under glass. This fall, the Conservatory will begin replacing hundreds of windows of the greenhouse roof, a process called reglazing. This major renovation effort will be paid for, in part, through the generosity of a Como Friends' donor.

The Conservatory's growing spaces are protected by double-paned polycarbonate, a lightweight plastic that diffuses sunlight effectively, while protecting plants from excess UV rays. While several bays in the extensive greenhouse were aging and due for replacement, a spring hail storm accelerated the need for maintenance. "A brief late-afternoon storm caused the reglazing to become a priority for our production space, with large and small holes that broke through the first layer of plastic," horticultural curator Lisa Philander says about

the May 19 weather system that dumped half-dollar-sized hail across St. Paul's Como-Midway neighborhood. "Greenhouse roofing has come a long way, and the new polycarb panes no longer yellow and are shatter resistant."

While the replacement process was delayed by supply chain problems, the panels arrived in September and the new roof was installed by the end of the month. "This is one of those projects visitors will never see, even though we'll experience the benefits of it in the beauty of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's plant collections," says Como Friends president Jackie Sticha. "Having a plant production space on this scale is one of the features that sets Como apart from other botanical gardens, so making sure it's properly updated and maintained is part of our mission at Como Friends."



RARE FIND

Once extinct in the wild, this tiny toad is making a big comeback thanks to Como Zoo's behind-the-scenes conservation efforts



POP QUIZ: Where do you go to see the most endangered animal in Como Zoo's collection? Polar Bear Odyssey? Gorilla Forest? Tropical Encounters?

While those are all good guesses, the correct answer is Ribbit Zibit, the small amphibian showcase in the Leonard Wilkening Children's Gallery in the Visitor Center. That's where you'll find this tiny, two inch, three ounce Wyoming toad—but maybe not if he sees you first.

"These little guys do like to bury themselves and hide, so they're not always easy to spot," says keeper Allison Pizel, who cares for about 50 Wyoming toads that live behind the scenes at Como. Now with plans for a new Amphibian Conservation Station coming soon to Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals Building, visitors will get a better glimpse of these rare amphibians, and the critical conservation work Como Zoo is doing to help these tiny toads make a comeback in the wild.



Once native to the Laramie Basin of Wyoming, the Wyoming toad saw a sudden and rapid population decline in the 1970s, possibly due to pesticide spraying, habitat loss and chytridiomycosis—an infectious fungal disease that's driven the decline of more than 500 amphibian species. By the early 1990s, the Wyoming toad was declared extinct in the wild, with just 12 remaining toads collected for captive breeding by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a small group of partner zoos.

Como Zoo joined the effort more than a decade ago, thanks in part to Como Friends' support for a special hibernaculum—a sort of biosecure refrigerator that helps to mimic the sustained climate conditions that encourage the Wyoming toads' breeding cycle. After spending a month to six weeks in the hibernation phase, adult frogs are ready to breed again, producing tadpoles, toadlets and "head start" toads that are released every summer near Mortenson Lake, Wyoming.



"It wasn't Como Zoo's best year of breeding success, but this year we were able to ship just under 1,000 tadpoles by FedEx," says Pizel, who joined other zookeepers in the project for the annual survey event in Wyoming. Working with GPS trackers and pit-tagging devices, volunteers place tiny microchips just under the toad's skin, alongside the backbone, and work to collect and weigh as many previously released Wyoming toads as they can find. *"There have been past surveys where people have not spotted a single adult or metamorph, but this was a really good year and we found a variety of ages and sizes of toads,"* Pizel says. Finding surviving toads from previous surveys is an encouraging sign that the Wyoming toad repatriation effort is making a difference.



Why do Wyoming toads matter? The most critically endangered amphibian in North America, they're just one of the estimated 168 amphibian species that have disappeared over the last two decades. *"They tell an important story about why conservation matters, and how devastating habitat destruction and disease can be for indicator species like amphibians. They're also incredibly cute, with their grumpy little faces,"* says Pizel, who has a particular soft spot for this toad she's dubbed "Stanley Croaker," named for the grumpy landlord on Three's Company.

Until the new Amphibian Conservation Station is ready in the Aquatic Animals Building, now under renovation, Pizel is adding a few more Wyoming toads to their current public display in Ribbit Zibit so that visitors have a better chance of seeing one this fall and winter. *"My goal is really to make visitors fall in love with these guys,"* she says.



RECONNECTING TO CONSERVATION

From online learning options to on-site animal training, Como is helping kids, families, and adults reconnect to the wonders of nature

Education Specialists in order of appearance: Erin, Ashley, Anne, and Brigid

After a four-year hiatus, Sparky the sea lion made a splashy comeback this summer in front of appreciative crowds in the new and improved Como Harbor, the seals and sea lions habitat that began construction in the heart of Como in 2018. The celebrity sea lion's return has been welcomed by visitors who fill the KSTP Amphitheater for the twice-daily shows. This year also saw the return of yellow school buses as local school districts resumed field trips. Over the summer, Como welcomed 33,000 more children and adults than visited the year before.

"It's been awesome to see so many kids return to Como," says public engagement education specialist Ashley Verdeck, who's been meeting young visitors face to face at the new Como

Cares interpretive stations on campus this season, and in the weekly Lil' Explorers program. *"Getting back to talking with people and making connections is great, and we all need a little practice at it. When I see a family with little kids coming, I give them a big smile to let them know we want them to interact with us. The younger we can hit them with education and the value of conservation, the more it can make a difference in their lives."*

One silver lining of social distancing has been the growth of online programs and virtual learning, which has helped to make Como's conservation resources more accessible to more students.

"Now schools all over the state have access to programs like Como Connections, which helps to bring conservation content into classrooms that may never have come to Como before," says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. *"Support from Como Friends helped Como make a successful transition to distance learning, and now that we've returned to public programs like the SPIRE Sparky Show, we can see that virtual programs also have a role to play in making Como more equitable and accessible for lots of different audiences."* Here's a look:

THE SPIRE SPARKY SHOW: A Minnesota tradition since 1956, the new SPIRE Sparky Show has been reimaged for a new generation, with an even greater focus on conservation, and lead roles shared by all seven boisterous and high-energy residents of the state-of-the-art habitat. Check it out daily at shows at 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

COMO CONNECTIONS: When teachers told Como they needed more science and conservation content for kids doing distance learning, Como's education team worked with the St. Paul school district's curriculum specialists to create a six-part series of videos and learning activities for second graders on SeeSaw, an online learning platform. Since then, Como Connections has gotten so many rave reviews that Como has expanded the curriculum to include content for older elementary and middle school learners. The program, paid for by contributions to Como Friends, is now available free of charge to classrooms across the state.

GARDENER AND KEEPER TALKS: If you're visiting Como on the weekends, be sure to take in one of the new gardener and keeper talks just re-launched this fall. *"We're taking a new approach to these talks, focusing very closely on one topic in a way that lets us go deeper into conservation and fostering empathy with visitors,"* Como's



interpretive specialist Frank Kermes says about new offerings that explore topics like giraffe adaptations and economic plants. *“And what’s really exciting is that our keepers and horticulturists have helped with the program development, so that they’re able to share their behind-the-scenes insights.”* Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays feature a free Keeper Talk at 11 a.m. and a Gardener Talk at 1 p.m.

LIL’ EXPLORERS: The early learning program Lil’ Explorers made a big comeback this year, with weekly themed programs offered free of charge every Thursday from 10 a.m. to noon. Created especially for the preschool crowd (though entertaining for any age), weekly themes like “Bird Buddies” and “Diggin’ Dinos” feature a story time, fun activities and crafts, and up-close encounters with animal and plant visitors. Staged outdoors during the summer months, Lil’ Explorers will move back into the Visitor Center this season.

INCLUSIVE ACCESS: From the new ASL interpreting offered through the summer at the SPIRE Sparky Show, to Senior Strolls, to the Sensory Friendly Mornings designed to welcome visitors with autism spectrum disorders, Como is helping to meet the diverse needs of our nearly two million annual visitors. To learn more about these accessible programs, visit the Special Events section at comozooconservatory.org.

INTERPRETATION STATIONS: Inviting visitors to get a little closer to Como’s animal and plant collections is the goal of two new visitor engagement programs offered this year. S.A.F.E. (short for Saving Animals from Extinction) runs on Wednesdays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., teaching visitors what they can do to help wild animals thrive. Como Cares, on Saturdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., focuses on Como’s own role as a conservation institution.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Como’s education specialists know how to meet kids where they are, and these days, they’re on TikTok. The short-form video sharing app has become a fun new platform for sharing Como’s comic side, mixing conservation themes and viral memes. Check it out at TikTok: [@comozooconservatory](https://www.tiktok.com/@comozooconservatory)

CLASS PASS: What would happen if you invited a scaly snake or a hairy spider to a Zoom call? That’s the magic of Class Pass, a live virtual field trip offering that Como’s education department launched over the last year. *“We’ve gotten really good at managing virtual meetings with classrooms and using document cameras and other tools to help students feel like they’re right up close to Como’s animal ambassadors,”* says Como education coordinator Brigid Murphy, one of a team of education specialists who hosted nearly 200 half-hour programs last year. *“Insects and spiders look great on*

camera—you can get up super close and see the hairs on a tarantula’s legs. The virtual platform is actually easier than trying to show a small animal to a whole classroom of kids—this way everyone can see.” A full library of pre-recorded Class Pass content is also available online for teachers to use whenever they like, to enrich classroom learning. *“We met a lot of kids who then brought their families on a visit to Como and recognized education specialists, or asked to see Anna the Banana plant or other animals and plants featured in Class Pass,”* says education specialist Erin Dimond. *“The positive connections they get from Class Pass are even more powerful when they visit Como.”*



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Location: Visitor Center at
Como Park Zoo & Conservatory

Phone: 651.487.8222
comofriends.org

Remember, Como Friends members enjoy 15% off every purchase, which helps to support the thriving flowers, gardens and green spaces of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.



Shop Sustainably at Garden Safari Gifts

Curbing waste and conserving wildlife is also part of the mission at Como Friends' Garden Safari Gifts. From cleverly upcycled handbags, and animal-tracking bracelets, to recycled wooden notebooks that support tree-planting and conservation around the country, Garden Safari Gifts actively curates unique gifts to make you feel good about shopping more sustainably. Plus, every purchase you make helps to benefit Como Park Zoo and Conservatory's wild and precious animals and plants!

