

C O M O F R I E N D S

INSIDER

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Plants for People

*The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's
North Garden showcases horticulture
with a human touch*

Photo by Susannah Baudhuin

COMO FRIENDS' FAMILY-FRIENDLY "COMO QUEST" EVENT COMING JUNE 4 AND 5!



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1225 Estabrook Drive | St. Paul, MN 55103 | 651.487.8229
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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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1225 Estabrook Drive | St. Paul, MN 55103
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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 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.



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

Summer Hours: Mon.–Fri. 10 am – 4 pm, Sat.–Sun. 10 am – 6 pm
Winter Hours: (October 1 – March 31) 10 am – 4 pm

COMO FRIENDS INSIDER

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COMO NEWS & EVENTS



WHERE FAMILY FUN AND PHILANTHROPY MEET COMO FRIENDS' COMO QUEST COMING JUNE 4 AND 5

Mark your calendars for a multigenerational fundraiser your whole family will love!

Coming June 4 and 5, Como Friends is launching our brand new Como Quest experience, a benefit for the digital and DIY age. Featuring a collaborative, curiosity-driven treasure hunt created with the GooseChase smartphone app, family-friendly games and crafts, and fabulous silent auction items, Como Quest is a great way to teach the next generation how to support the life-giving conservation work that takes place at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory every day.

Visit our website or watch your inbox for more details!

Como Friends is happy to announce a new partnership with SPIRE Credit Union, as the title sponsor of the



After diving into her new home at Como Harbor, Sparky the sea lion is making her big debut in the new **SPIRE Sparky Show**. Every Como visitor is invited to see this splashy conservation demonstration, highlighting the amazing behaviors of sea lions like Sparky, and how we can help protect oceans and other wild places. **Starting May 7, the free program will run daily at 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. in the new KSTP Amphitheater at Como Harbor.**



COMO NEWS & EVENTS

Como Town opens
Saturday, May 14!



Remember, Como Friends members enjoy 15% off every purchase at Garden Safari Gifts, which helps to support the thriving flowers, gardens and green spaces of Como Park Zoo & Conservatory. Now with a location in Como Town!



PACK YOUR COMO FRIENDS MEMBER CARD FOR GREAT DEALS ALL SUMMER LONG!

Como Friends' members support improvements and free admission at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. And while supporting Minnesota's free Zoo and Conservatory is its own reward, members also receive special perks! **To learn about all our member benefits, go to: comofriends.org/give/membership/ or call 651-487-8229.**

Thank you to our partners at Como Town for providing "Fun Cards" to members at the Supporter level.

Leave a Legacy

Como Park Zoo & Conservatory is a treasure in our backyard. Owned by all, enjoyed by all, and free to all.

Include Como Friends in your estate plan to keep Como admission free and vibrant for future generations. Your support is key to keeping Como a world-class natural wonder in the heart of the city that is accessible to all and here for years to come.

To learn more about what your planned gift can make possible today and tomorrow, contact Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving, at 651-487-8296.

COMO NEWS & EVENTS



COMO FRIENDS' SUNSET AFFAIR

"Discover Como" on July 21, 2022

A Minnesota tradition for more than a century and a meeting place for generations of families, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is so much more than a zoo and botanical garden. A cultural treasure and a true community resource, Como welcomes everyone and belongs to us all.

Join us as we "Discover Como" all over again at Como Friends' Sunset Affair, a summer gala to celebrate the extraordinary animals and plants, exciting education programs, and exceptional keepers and horticulturists who connect our

community to the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

Whether you join us in person, or log in for a virtual experience, every guest at Sunset Affair will have the chance to bid on the amazing, only-at-Como Silent Auction items that have made our summer gala a can't-miss moment for so many.

Gather your friends, reserve your preferred ticket option, and get ready to "Discover Como" anew on July 21!



Guests at Como Friends' Bouquets benefit in February set a new record for bids at the event's silent auction, featuring exceptional vintages and wine and food experiences donated by the community. The festive wine, beer and food experience gave guests an after-hours encounter with the gorgeous gardens of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory.

After 15 years managing all things horticulture at Como, Dombrowski says the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory and Como Park Zoo & Conservatory gardens provided just the right conditions for growing many of the things she cares about most—tropical and temperate plants, butterflies, and the programs that teach visitors about the extraordinary beauty and diversity of the earth’s plant kingdom. A graduate of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, who developed her early passion for plants as a Peace Corp volunteer in Barbados, Dombrowski retired in April 2022 after a four-decade career in horticulture and public gardening.

A lot of serious gardeners wouldn’t be interested in moving from zone 8 to zone 4. What made you decide to come to Minnesota?

I told my friends in Texas at the time that it was about the opportunity to be working under two acres of glass. But I’m a Yankee from upstate New York so I knew I could handle Zone 4 winters. There were so many wonderful things just getting started at Como at the time. Como Friends had just completed a huge capital campaign that had helped to create the new Visitor Center, the Fern Room, the Orchid Room and what was then the Bonsai Gallery, and of course, the Visitor Center Water Gardens. During my first week we were getting ready for the opening of Tropical Encounters. So I was really in awe of all of the wonderful things happening.

And that was just the start of the transformation that’s taken place across the campus over the last two decades.

That’s right. During my tenure I had the chance to work on the expansion of the Bonsai collection display in the new Ordway Gardens, the renovation of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden, as well as the work we’ve done in partnership with Como Zoo in Polar Bear Odyssey, Gorilla Forest, and now Como Harbor. And of course, creating the Visitor Center forecourt gardens, which have provided a beautiful entryway into Como. With two million visitors, it was a struggle to maintain the large expanse of turf grass we used to have—tremendous foot traffic created brown pounded dirt paths by fall!

What project are you most proud of?

That would be like picking a favorite child—I can’t do it! But a fun little project that brought the Zoo and Conservatory expertise together was the Butterfly Exhibit.

A GARDENING GOODBYE

An interview with Tina Dombrowski, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s long-time curator



When Tina Dombrowski accepted the job as horticulture curator of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory in 2006, her colleagues at a public garden in Dallas thought she might be making a mistake. “My friends in Texas said ‘You’re moving where?’” Dombrowski says with a laugh.

For a total of six years, with support from Como Friends, we brought in thousands of exotic butterflies from around the world that allowed visitors to see the interrelationships between flowering nectar plants and non-threatening members of the invertebrate world. In many cases, people understand and relate easier to animals than to plants. This exhibit emphasized the vital connection of plants and animals and promoted conservation of species diversity.

What lessons about plants and gardening did you learn at Como?

I felt very fortunate to learn about Japanese gardening from our horticulturists, gardeners, volunteers and our professional consultant John Powell, a national expert on Japanese gar-

den design who has been involved in the garden’s renovation since 2012 thanks to support from Como Friends. I had visited Japan, but the principles of Japanese-style gardening were very new to me—learning about the refined aesthetics, special skills, design principals and how these are intrinsic to Japanese culture. It’s a specialized, refined craft and we’re so fortunate to have such a fine example of it here at Como.

The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory also celebrated its centennial in 2015. What has it meant to you to be one of the stewards of a century-old institution?

It’s certainly been an honor to fulfill and continue the mission and legacy of some very big names in gardening and landscape design like Horace Cleveland,

Frederick Nussbaumer, George Nason and Masami Matsuda. Along with the State Capitol and Cathedral of St. Paul, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is one of the three domes of St. Paul and it contributes so much to our sense of place. Over the years I’ve enjoyed receiving letters and photographs from people sharing their memories, handwritten letters saying, “I was just going through my great-grandmother’s things and found this picture of her in the Palm Dome when she was 10...” The Conservatory has been so much a part of the lives of local families for generations, and that’s inspirational.

What do you hope people get out of a visit to the Conservatory?

Many things—I think it depends on the individual. Maybe for a bride and groom it’s an elegant garden where they’re going to mark a milestone in their lives surrounded by friends and family. For a student with a school group, maybe they’ll discover something new, like where chocolate comes from. You hear a lot now about the benefits of “forest bathing,” spending time in nature, and the wellness connection between green space and mental health, so I hope it’s a place that helps people slow down and closely observe the plants and animals around them. I hope they just immerse themselves in the humidity, beauty, and the sights and the sounds—because yes, plants can create sound!

Managing Como through the pandemic over the last two years must have been a challenge. What’s made it worthwhile for you?

Working outdoors, particularly in 2020, we encountered so many visitors who would say “we really appreciate what you’re doing.” I believe the community is aware of how special Como is—a public garden that’s free to anyone who wants to come, 365 days a year. I think back to 2015 when we co-hosted the American Public Gardens Association annual conference with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. One of the planning committee members remarked on the broad diversity of our visitors. They were amazed to see so many different people of all ages and abilities enjoying the Conservatory, taking photos, sketching and reading, gathering with friends and family. The fact that so many people feel at home in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is exceptional. I hope the next Horticulture Curator has as much fun and as many adventures as I’ve had here at Como.

From African acacia and Mediterranean figs, to Indian neem trees (a) and Arabian coffee plants, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's North Garden represents a palette of plants from more places than any other collection at Como. Though many plants that grow side-by-side here are separated by continents in nature, there is one thing that they all have in common, says horticulture specialist Jen Love (pictured right). "These are all plants that are useful to people and that have some history of human cultivation. From fruits that we eat, to the textiles we wear, to building materials and medicine, these are all plants that people have figured out how to use creatively." **Here's a look at some of the highlights:**



(a)

Great Adaptations: Animals and plants often have to adapt to each other to survive, a process you can see at work in at least two plant species from the North Garden. One is the acacia tree (b), which has light, spiny thorns to reflect sunlight and to protect it from predators. "As far as plant adaptations go, these thorns really demand respect," Love says. "But animals are amazing, too, and over time, giraffes have adapted their long tongues to be nimble enough to eat the foliage from an acacia branch."

Another interesting adaptation can be seen in the spiny, horn-like protrusions on the trunk of the floss silk tree (c), which produces a fruit pod filled with a cottony fiber that's been used for everything from pillow stuffing to insulation. "This plant evolved at the same time that giant sloths were around, so those spines were an adaptation that helped protect the trunk of these trees," says Love. While the giant sloth died away more than 11,000 years ago, the floss silk's spiny bumps have survived.



(b, c, d)

Growing strong: Did you know that bamboo has even more tensile strength than timber or steel? One of the world's fastest growing plants, bamboo is also a superstar of sustainability—it sequesters carbon, protects soil from erosion and landslides, and takes less time and resources than timber to harvest. "But bamboo really wants to spread, so I'm often having to dig up the bamboo runners to keep it from taking over," Love says. If you want to see how bamboo (d) stands up as a building material, check out the fencing that surrounds the tea garden in the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden.

PLANTS *for* PEOPLE

The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's North Garden showcases horticulture with a human touch

JEN
HORTICULTURE
STAFF

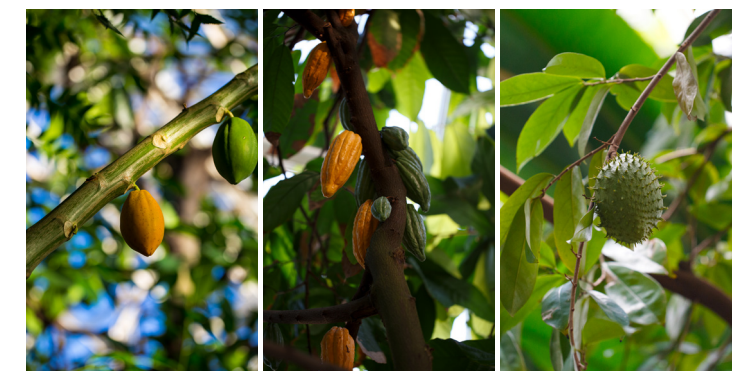
MARJORIE McNEELY
CONSERVATORY

Natural medicine: Rainforests are sometimes called "the earth's medicine chest," and no wonder—nearly 25 percent of all drugs used today are derived from rainforest plants. The North Garden collection includes plenty of plants with curative properties, from the ayahuasca plant (e) used in psychotropic brews, to the kava plant that's being studied for its sedative and anti-anxiety applications. One multipurpose healer is this neem tree native to India, which is credited with curing everything from dandruff to diabetes.



(e)

Low-hanging fruit: From citrus and star fruit, to figs and pineapples, the North Garden is a cornucopia of delicious edibles—offerings that can look very tempting to Conservatory visitors. "You can look, but we do ask visitors not to touch," says Love. "We try to keep fruits on the vine until they're nearly ready to fall off, because we want every visitor to get a chance to see what bananas, papaya (f), and cacao pods (g) really look like in nature." One fruit that's rarely seen in Minnesota grocery aisles is the graviola (h), or prickly custard apple, native to Central America. Widely grown in more tropical climates, its fruit is found in everything from ice cream to meat tenderizer.



(f, g, h)



Polar bears are loners by nature. While the world's largest bears will meet up to mate or wait for sea ice to form, and new mothers will live and hunt with young cubs, the majority of a polar bear's life will be spent as a solo act.

So how has Como Zoo managed to get polar bears Kulu, Nan and Neil to share Polar Bear Odyssey without serious roommate troubles?

"It's a process that takes a lot of patience and observation," says senior keeper Allison Jungheim, a member of the aquatic animal team that's helped create a positive environment in Polar Bear Odyssey for long-time resident Neil and his two new neighbors. Here's a look at how they do it.

ROOMMATE WANTED: Following the death of his twin brother Buzz in 2020, Neil was showing signs "that he could really use a buddy," says Jungheim, who is also the program leader for the Polar Bear Species Survival Plan (SSP), the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' (AZA) advisory group that uses a science-based approach in managing the population in North American zoos. Since Neil is one of the oldest zoo polar bears in North America, the committee matched him with a partner of the same vintage, 26-year-old Nan, from Brookfield Zoo in Chicago, IL who'd originally been rescued as an orphan cub in Alaska.

HOWDY PARTNER: While Nan and Neil will never be breeding partners, it was important to make sure the pair got off to a positive start before they moved into Polar Bear Odyssey's outdoor habitat. Behind the scenes, each got the chance to see and smell the other bear through a mesh barrier that allows for what the keepers call a "Howdy." "We start all of our introductions in a controlled setting," Jungheim explains. "Through the howdy window, the bears can have nose to nose contact. We're looking for positive interactions between the mesh, and you're looking at when you can take that next step and open it up a little more."



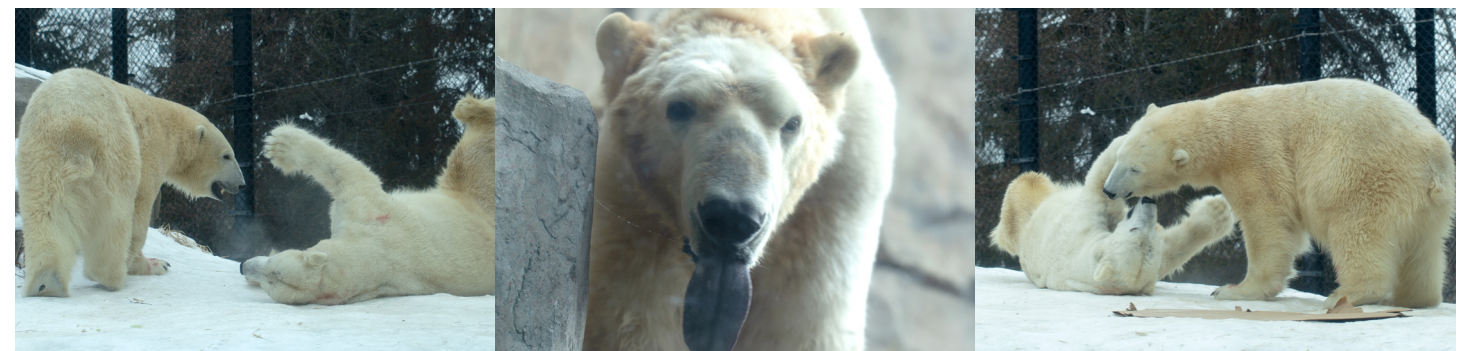
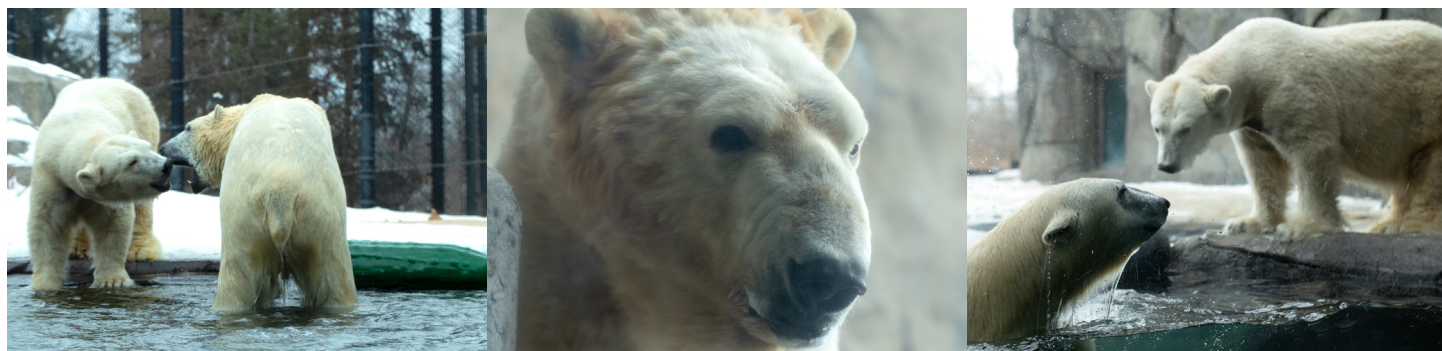
GETTING TO KNOW YOU: As weeks go on, and keepers are satisfied that the bears are curious about each other, and not showing signs of stress, it's time to remove the barriers and see how they do in the same space. "We have to prepare for things to go wrong, so we have hoses and fire extinguishers and air horns that we could use to distract

them, and keepers stay in the area so we can close doors and separate them if things go badly," she says. Fortunately, Neil's 1,000-pound brawn and Nan's bossiness were well balanced. "Polar bear girls tend to just be the boss, they're the ones who rule the habitat, she lets him know when she wants to do something and she does it," Jungheim explains.

ROOM FOR THREE: Once they were settled in, Nan and Neil got a new neighbor—two-year-old Kulu, born at the Columbus Zoo. When his mother was recommended for breeding again, something that typically occurs when cubs turn two to three years old, the polar bear Species Survival Plan decided it was time for Kulu to make his move to Minnesota in October. Like most two-year-olds, Kulu is energetic, curious and a little naughty, even finding a way to pull up the grates in his pools. To give him a little maternal guidance, help channel his rambunctious behavior, and provide companionship, keepers introduced him to Nan first, allowing them to meet backstage before moving into one side of Polar Bear Odyssey. "They became thick as thieves, wrestling and playing and showing a lot of good, appropriate behavior," Jungheim says, noting that all three bears are crazy about the giant plastic pickles keepers occasionally introduce as enrichment. "They are the best toys for bears. They can't get enough of them."

ALL TOGETHER NOW: After a few months of seeing his neighbors frolicking, "Neil was showing signs that he may want to join in on the fun," Jungheim says, a cue that it was time to introduce the older male to the young cub. By March, the threesome had begun merging on a regular basis, impressing keepers with their ability to play together appropriately. "Nan is just as bossy as ever, and Neil and Kulu have been very respectful of each other," Jungheim says. "Even though Neil's an old man with not very many teeth, he's a few hundred pounds bigger than Kulu and can get him to back down when necessary."

SOCIALIZATION SUPPORT: Your contributions to Como Friends help to promote positive connections between animals and keepers, investing in everything from the operant conditioning training programs that help Como Zoo animals cooperate with their own health care, to the cool enrichment toys that keep Kulu curious and engaged with his surroundings. **Thank you!**





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Garden Safari Gifts is hiring! Check out our Employment Opportunities page to learn more about how to apply and grow the great work of Como Friends.
comofriends.org/about-us/employment-opportunities/



What's the buzz?

From beautiful butterflies to busy, buzzy bees, tiny but mighty pollinators bring our world into full bloom. This growing season, Garden Safari Gifts is full of fun ways to celebrate these beneficial bugs, with blingy, butterfly accessories, sustainable beeswax wrap and butterfly water bottles, and so much more.

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.

