

C O M O F R I E N D S

INSIDER

Summer 2022 | Volume 24 | Number 3



Photo by Susannah Baudhuin

Discover Como

Celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory has been the familiar backdrop to more than five generations of family memories.

YOUR SUPPORT PROTECTS BARRIER-FREE ACCESS FOR ALL!

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COMO NEWS & EVENTS



September 17 & 18, 2022

CONSERVATION LEARNING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT COME TOGETHER IN COMO QUEST

Teams of treasure hunters explored Como Park Zoo & Conservatory's grounds in June for Como Quest, a new family fundraiser for Como Friends. "Como Quest was designed to be a really engaging, interactive event, and we were thrilled by how many guests told us they loved learning about conservation while helping to support a community treasure," says Caroline Mehlhop, Como Friends' director of institutional partnerships and events. "It was fantastic to see multi-generational teams tackle the conservation-themed scavenger hunt together."

Visit our website, watch your inbox, and follow us on social media for September event details!



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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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

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

COMO FRIENDS INSIDER

Art Direction & Design: Susannah Baudhuin
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HOW TO REACH US

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COMO NEWS & EVENTS



SPONSOR AN ANIMAL OR GARDEN

This summer, sponsor an animal or garden with Como Friends and be entered into a drawing to win a chance to meet Chloe the sloth who lives in Como's Tropical Encounters habitat!

Animal and Garden Sponsorships are the perfect gift for nature lovers of all ages! When you sponsor one of Como's beloved animals or gardens you make possible free admission for every visitor, innovative veterinary care for Como Zoo's animals, and thoughtful preservation of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory gardens.

TO ENTER THE DRAWING:

1. Sponsor an animal or garden by August 31
2. Share a picture of your sponsorship on social media and tell us why you love Como.
3. Tag Como Friends at @comofriends on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter!

Call 651-487-8229 or visit our website at comofriends.org/give/sponsor-an-animal-to-sponsor-your-animal-or-garden/

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



INSPIRE FUTURE GENERATIONS TO DISCOVER COMO

Guests and supporters of Sunset Affair: Discover Como in July help ensure that Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is here to be discovered again and again by generations to come. Sunset Affair truly highlights the widespread support and love the community has for Como with participation from individuals, local businesses, and corporate partners—all joining together to benefit one of Minnesota's most beloved settings where cost is not a barrier.

The Sunset Affair Fund-A-Need is an important way you can support Como, a cultural treasure and a free and welcoming oasis for all. **Make a gift today at comofriends.org/events/sunset-affair/sunsetaffairgiving/. This year, your gift will:**

Thank you Sponsors!

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Welcome school field trips back to Como, while providing new virtual education programs to connect with kids across the state.



Provide cutting-edge animal care, including specialized equipment and training strategies to support the care of a variety of breeding and aging animals in the year ahead.



Support more than 11 acres of interior and exterior gardens and plantings, inspiring visitors with the beauty and bounty of the natural world.



Continue the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's tradition of rotating flower shows in the beautiful Sunken Garden.



Improve access and advance inclusivity for people of all ages and abilities with stroller-friendly doors, wheelchair lifts, and new sound systems around Como's campus.



Create exciting new habitats, including the major renovation underway in Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals Building.



Help us throw the doors wide open for our diverse audience of more than 1.7 million annual visitors. Thanks to you, Como's free admission ensures equal access for visitors of all ages, income levels and ethnicities.



COMO'S TWO NEW CURATORS



Two new leaders are about to make their mark at Como—Como Zoo general curator Geoff Hall and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory horticultural curator Lisa Philander. Both native Minnesotans with national and

international experience in their respective fields, Philander and Hall both started their new positions this season, following the retirements of longtime animal curator John Dee and horticultural curator Tina Dombrowski



What made you an animal person?

My very first zoo experience was at Como as a toddler and that experience was key to my life's vocation—I've never once veered away from wanting to work with animals. I'm from Rochester, and I remember coming to Como Zoo in the early 1970s, and I was a full-on zoo fanatic by the summer of 1978 when the Minnesota Zoo opened. I studied biology at Concordia College in Moorhead, and had my first experience as an intern at the Brookfield Zoo in Illinois.

Since then, you've managed animal collections at zoos in Baltimore, Phoenix, Cleveland, and Kansas City, you led a no-kill pet adoption nonprofit in Missouri, and you helped launch the Red River Zoo in Fargo as its first executive director. Out of all the animals you've met, what's your favorite?

That is the impossible question! The two groups of animals within the zoo industry that I've worked most with are elephants and frogs—both ends of the size spectrum. The fact Como has a very vibrant frog

program is something that I love. For a person who is fully an animal geek, the animal collection here is remarkable—not just for a zoo of Como's size, but for any size zoo. We have some incredibly rare and endangered species here that some visitors may not even be aware of, so the impact this institution has is very significant.

Como is the most visited cultural institution in the state. What do you think accounts for the enduring popularity of zoos?

Zoos are a meeting place, a juncture between society and nature. There's a lot of research showing that humans have an innate desire to connect with other living things, and zoos provide us with this unique opportunity to explore the world in a very embraceable way.

There's also research about how zoos provide a kind of social glue, a place where parents bring their kids to teach them how to behave and interact in the world. I just love zoo environments, they give me energy. I think there's something very magical about bringing people and wildlife together.



How did you become a plant person?

I started out as a pre-med student, but it quickly became clear I was squeamish about blood and I realized that wasn't going to work. On a study abroad trip to Costa Rica, I encountered some weeds on the side of the road—sensitive plants that closed up when the rain hit them—as I was entering a botanical garden. I was so excited by these, and then to be in a tropical rainforest for the first time seeing these huge buttressed trees, amazing vines, and orchids all over that I became an instant plant lady. Since I already had an extensive background in biology, it didn't take me long to earn a horticultural degree at the University of Minnesota, where I started working at the biological science greenhouse while I was still a student.

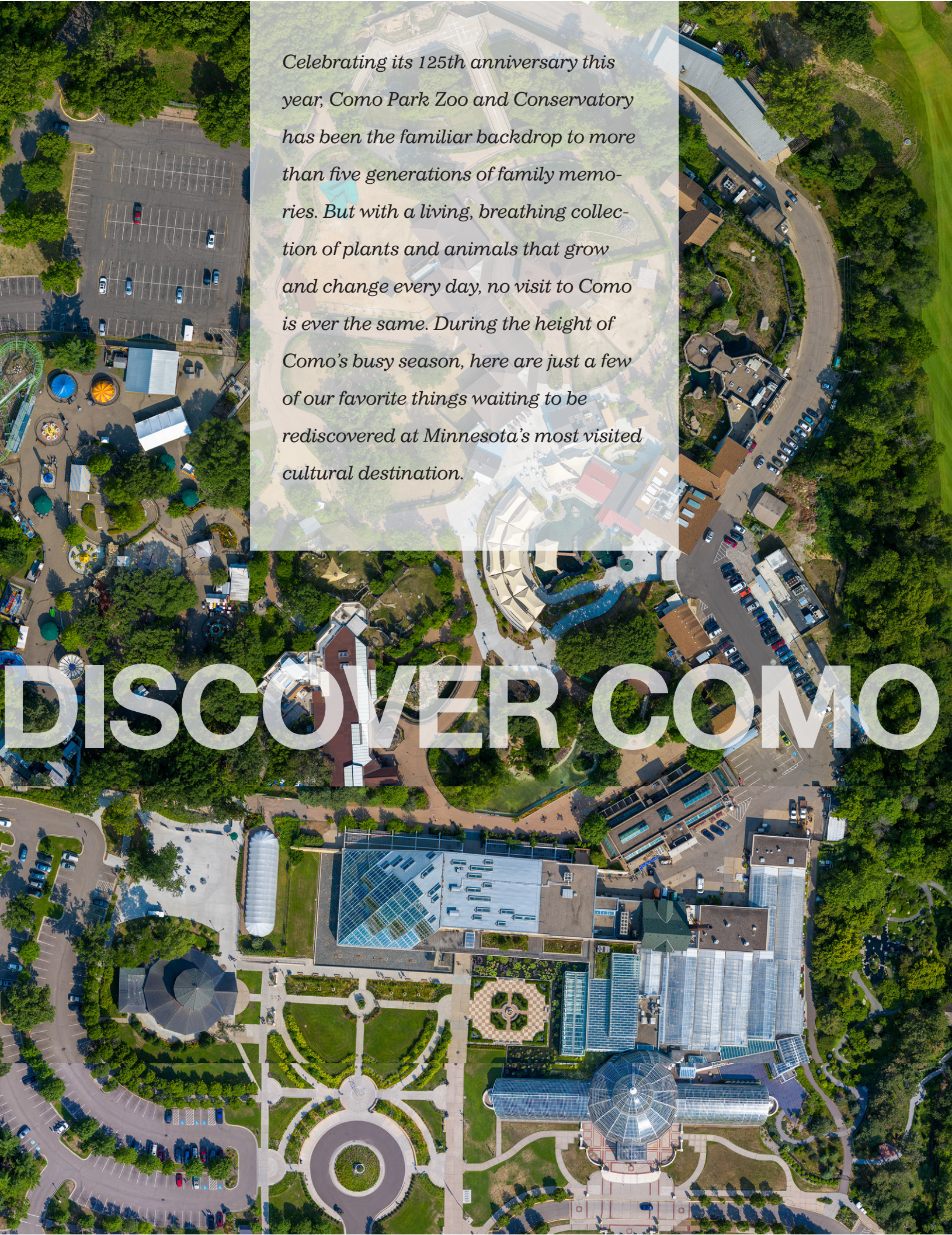
Your horticultural career has taken you from England's Kew Gardens, to the Los Angeles County Arboretum, to field work in South Africa, Wyoming and several stops in between. What attracted you to the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory?



I see so much potential here. It's a well-loved, historical, highly-visited place where there's so much room for connecting to local communities. Maybe because I wanted to be a doctor, I've come to think about plants and gardens for their healing ability—the way that having these interactions with living things has an effect. That's probably why the North Garden is what I like the most, because it's filled with medicinal plants that have these deep connections to human history.

What do you think explains the explosion of interest in gardening we've seen over the last two years?

During COVID, everybody was forced to stop what they were doing and stop planning. When there were no trips planned, no parties, it was hard to find things to look forward to. But being in a garden is an anticipatory process—you're always waiting and excited for something new to happen, watching things change from day to day or season to season. For me, that's what gardening is all about.



DISCOVER COMO

Celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory has been the familiar backdrop to more than five generations of family memories. But with a living, breathing collection of plants and animals that grow and change every day, no visit to Como is ever the same. During the height of Como's busy season, here are just a few of our favorite things waiting to be rediscovered at Minnesota's most visited cultural destination.



SAVING GRACE

Species preservation isn't just for animals. The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is one of several botanical sites around the world that's helping to keep the *Osa pulchra* plant alive and well. Challenging to grow, and one of the rarest plants known, this flowering plant from the coffee family Rubiaceae comes from the Osa peninsula in southwestern Costa Rica, where fewer than thirty individual plants now survive in the wild. This exceptional bloomer with its trumpet-shaped flowers can be found in Como's North Garden, which highlights plants that have been bred and cultivated by humans.



LEARNING TO LOVE NATURE

In a typical year, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory welcomes nearly 850,000 kids under the age of 18. Some of our very favorite young visitors are Lil' Explorers, the one- to three-year-olds who join us every Thursday morning for this free early learning program, made possible with funding from the Minnesota Legacy Amendment. Set to run

outdoors through the summer, themed programs like "Reptile Rock n' Roll," "Fun with Fish," and "Fantastic Frogs," feature cameo appearances by Como's favorite animal ambassadors, helping teach little visitors about the wonders of our world.



TAKING IT SLOW

While Como Harbor has been open for nearly a year, two residents are still taking their time getting to know the neighbors. Stanley and Wallace, Atlantic gray seals who came to Como last year after being rescued, were introduced to harbor seals Kash and Kilian earlier this spring. "We chose them because we thought they'd be a little mellower than the sea lions, but Kilian chased them pretty relentlessly," Jungheim says. "Now we'll be working on building up their tolerance for being together, starting maybe with 20 minutes at a time and working our way up."



WABI-SABI WONDER

One of the treasures at Como often comes as a complete surprise to new visitors—the charming Japanese Tea House nestled into the shade of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden. Designed to mim-

Drone photo by Nick Nelson

ic a rustic 16th century Japanese farm house, the sukiya-style house embodies a Japanese aesthetic known as wabi sabi—a belief that transience, time, impermanence and imperfection add beauty to an object.

This season, the Conservatory is resuming its Japanese Tea Service events, supported by volunteers schooled in the traditions and rituals of this centuries-old practice. To reserve your tickets, visit comozooconservatory.org/como/japanese-garden/.



LOW IMPACT PLANTING

Looking for sustainable gardening ideas for your own backyard? The Minnesota Garden that now greets visitors at Como's front door is filled with native and adaptive plants that require less water and that thrive in zones 4 and 5. Come see what's blooming as you plot your own plans for cultivating a low-impact perennial garden.



NATURE IN MINIATURE

In the north woods of Minnesota, a Tamarack tree can reach heights of 80 feet. But in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's acclaimed Bonsai collection, this Tamarack tree will always be a fraction of its full size thanks to the careful tending and training it receives from Como's horticulturists. Nearly any tree species can be turned into a Bonsai (pronounced: bone-sigh), a fact visitors can see on full display this summer on Como's Bonsai Terrace, which features about a dozen potted trees that rotate throughout the season.



SHARING THE SPOTLIGHT

Since 1956, Sparky the Sea Lion has taken center stage as Como Zoo's aquatic animal ambassador. But with a splashy new habitat in Como Harbor that's home to seven different pinnipeds, Sparky's starting to share the spotlight. With the launch of the new SPIRE Sparky Show in May, visitors have been getting to know all of Como's marine mammals—sea lions Subee, Poppy and Niko, harbor seals Kash and Kilian, and Atlantic gray seals Stanley and Wallace. All seven Como Harbor residents take star turns showcasing their natural behaviors and native curiosity in daily programs at the KSTP Amphitheater at 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.



WOLVES AT BAY

The eerie call of the gray wolf is back at Como thanks to new arrivals Nicky and Cerberus, a pair of litter-mates born at the Wildlife Science Center in Stacy, Minnesota and moved to Como Zoo last fall. "Wolves are hard to work with and very skittish and it takes awhile to build trust," says Marisa Paulat, part of a team of wolf and large cat keepers who've been spending quality time with the wolves. During the summer you may notice keepers enter the Wolf Woods, providing "free contact" care to the pair, spending short periods within the habitat. The goal is to make the wolves comfortable enough with their caregivers to participate in training sessions eventually, "but right now, when they see us coming, they move to the opposite end of the enclosure," says keeper Hans Jorgensen.



SEEN AROUND TOWN

Como isn't the only place where Sparky's been making a splash. This summer, 20 Sparky statues, each hand-painted by a local artist, are decorating several spots at Como and some of the Twin Cities' most iconic destinations, including the Science Museum of Minnesota, Rice Park, Harriet Island, and the Minneapolis RBC Gateway. Highlighting the return of Como's beloved SPIRE Sparky Show, the public art campaign is also designed to bring attention to ocean conservation efforts around the world.



SEEING STRIPES

A new zebra foal is finding her footing in Como Zoo's African hoofstock habitat this season. Born on May 24, the darling baby is the offspring of father Ulysses, and mother Minnie. Guests at Como Friends' new Como Quest fundraising event got the chance to vote on her name and chose "Aurora" after Minnesota's professional women's soccer team. Want a chance to enjoy only-Como experiences getting up close to the animals and gardens? Buy a ticket to Como Quest, Sunset Affair or Bouquets, where the silent auctions feature upcoming Only-at-Como experiences.



ALWAYS IN BLOOM

While summer's annuals burst and fade in our backyard gardens, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's Sunken Garden is always at its peak. Summer sunsets are the inspiration for this year's Summer Flower Show, featuring fiery reds like the Hibiscus 'Imperial Dragon', red salvia and dark red verbena, citrus-y orange begonias, tangerine impatiens, and striped tiki torch petunias. Como's longest-running flower show captures the gloaming warmth of the season's long days now through October 2.



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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.



Keeping Cool, Looking Cool

As summer sizzles, Garden Safari Gifts has everything you need to stay cool! From colorful beverage containers, to breezy Como-themed summer apparel, and belt bags making a big come-back, you're sure to find great gift items to keep you looking cool this season. And remember, every purchase you make benefits the animals and plants you love at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory!



*Additional gift shop locations: Polar Bear Odyssey and Como Town