



como friends  
THRIVE ON

# BUILDING COMMUNITY

2021 Annual Report



# TOTAL CONTRIBUTION | \$1,684,372



## COMO ZOO.....\$598,050

Como Harbor New Seals and Sea Lions Habitat . . . . .	\$240,000
Zookeeper Positions & Care for the Animals . . . . .	\$91,050
Direct Support for the Care of the Animals . . . . .	\$100,000
Aquatic Animals Building Renovation . . . . .	\$131,200
Wolf Woods Fencing . . . . .	\$25,000
Specialized Dive Equipment to Maintain Como Harbor . . . .	\$5,800
Purchase of Birds to Add Diversity to Collection in Tropical Encounters . . . . .	\$5,000

## MARJORIE MCNEELY CONSERVATORY.. \$640,527

Gardener Positions, Training & Operations . . . . .	\$332,041
Contribution to Marjorie McNeely Conservatory Endowment Fund . . . . .	\$283,686
Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden Restoration & Technical Training . . . . .	\$18,800
Addition of Orchids to Collection . . . . .	\$2,000
New Plants for Tropical Encounters . . . . .	\$4,000

## COMO CAMPUS.....\$295,497

Direct Support for the Care of the Animals and Gardens . . . . .	\$200,000
Advocacy . . . . .	\$55,564
Architecture Plans to Address Rusting Stairs at Visitor Center Entrance. . . . .	\$15,000
Como Campus Improvements & Support . . . . .	\$24,933

## CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION .....\$119,298

Education Positions & Annual Operations . . . . .	\$71,200
Development of New Guest Engagement Strategy . . . . .	\$33,098
Free 2nd Grade Virtual Field Trip Program Offered Statewide . . . . .	\$9,000
Free 2nd Grade Virtual Field Trips for St. Paul Public Schools. . . . .	\$6,000

## VOLUNTEER SERVICES .....\$31,000

Staff Positions & Annual Operations . . . . .	\$31,000
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## Dear Como Friends Supporters,

With roots that go back to 1897, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory has been a common thread connecting more than six generations of Minnesota families. From the Greatest Generation who watched as Como Zoo's first buildings went up with help from the Works Progress Administration, to the Baby Boomers who remember the very first Sparky the Sea Lion, to the Gen Z'ers who came to celebrate the unveiling of our extraordinary new Como Harbor last spring, coming to Como is a memory that millions of Minnesotans have shared, during bright sunny days and uncertain times.

Maybe that's why so many visitors made a point of telling us just how much Como's constancy and consistency meant to them in 2021. As we endured a second year of social distancing, with pandemic impacts felt in nearly every part of our lives, coming to Como has been a favorite way to reconnect to the familiar, the place we go to feel recharged and renewed by the beauty and wonder of the natural world.

At Como Friends, we're proud of Como's long history of bringing our community together. But we're even more inspired by what community support is making possible now and in the future. From the gorgeous exterior gardens that greet visitors at Como's front door, to the beautiful Sunken Garden Shows in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, to the engaging virtual programs now available to visitors at home, to the fantastic improvements taking shape in Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals Building this year, today's Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is transforming to serve the 21st century needs of our audience. And thanks to the generous support of the individuals, families, businesses and foundations whose names appear in this annual report, there's one thing that will always remain a constant at Como—our commitment to providing free and equitable access to every visitor.

While the last two years have tested us, it's also been a time of growth as we've learned new skills to protect the animals and plants in our care, discovered new platforms for presenting our programs, and found new ways to connect visitors to Como, across distances and differences. As we look forward to coming together more often in the year ahead, we're grateful for all the ways your support has helped us to build community at Como. Thanks to you, Como Park Zoo and Conservatory can continue to be a touch-point that connects us all.

Thank you for all you do for Como!

Jackie Sticha  
President  
Como Friends

Patrick McIntyre  
Board Chair  
Como Friends Board of Directors





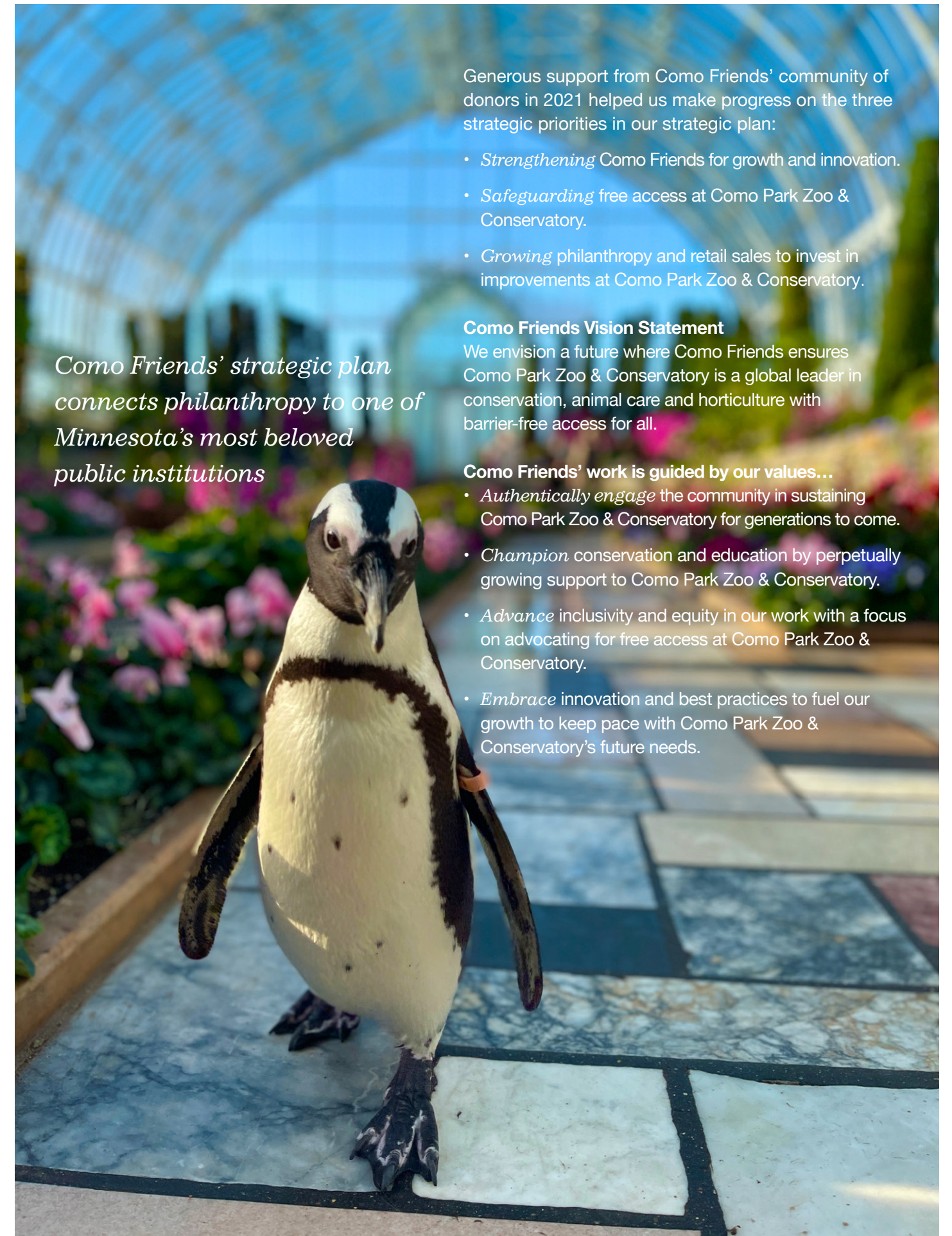
## BUILDING COMMUNITY with generosity

“I grew up not far from Como, so it was always in my blood. But it wasn’t until I was a guest at Sunset Affair many years ago, and my family got a chance to go behind the scenes and name a new giraffe that I really fell in love. What I find special is the way this whole community—the city, the staff, the donors, the visitors, and Como Friends—all come together to keep improving Como and to keep Como free to everyone. They’ve been bold in their fundraising efforts and in their aspirations. This isn’t a community that says, ‘Good enough.’ Instead they say, ‘Let’s work together to make everything even better.’

“When Como Friends first recruited me to join their board of directors, I didn’t know if it would be my thing. But after nine years of board service, I am forever grateful that I got this chance. I learned so much about things I never would have—like what it takes to get a blood draw from a polar bear, or how much work goes into creating a flower show, or what it means that Como has been accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for so many years. I don’t think I would have understood that Como’s conservation work has an impact nationally, and even internationally, if I hadn’t served on the board.

“When people ask me why I care so much about Como Friends, I tell them it’s because we’re like the puzzle piece that connects the donor community to the city, and it’s that connection that makes so many more things possible. You have to support the places that bring you joy and make you happy so that future generations can experience the same thing. ”

—Nicky Nagle, Community Volunteer, Como Friends Board of Directors



Generous support from Como Friends’ community of donors in 2021 helped us make progress on the three strategic priorities in our strategic plan:

- *Strengthening* Como Friends for growth and innovation.
- *Safeguarding* free access at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory.
- *Growing* philanthropy and retail sales to invest in improvements at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory.

### Como Friends Vision Statement

We envision a future where Como Friends ensures Como Park Zoo & Conservatory is a global leader in conservation, animal care and horticulture with barrier-free access for all.

### Como Friends’ work is guided by our values...

- *Authentically engage* the community in sustaining Como Park Zoo & Conservatory for generations to come.
- *Champion* conservation and education by perpetually growing support to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory.
- *Advance* inclusivity and equity in our work with a focus on advocating for free access at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory.
- *Embrace* innovation and best practices to fuel our growth to keep pace with Como Park Zoo & Conservatory’s future needs.





*Promoting equitable access  
for all visitors is a core  
value for Como Friends.*



## BUILDING COMMUNITY *through equity and access*

Always the most visited cultural institution in the state of Minnesota, Como's commitment to accessibility remained a constant in 2021, even under the most challenging circumstances. While pandemic precautions prevailed, innovative programs like Como LIVE! made it possible to connect more than 1.4 million Facebook viewers to everything that was happening at Como, from celebrating Sudi the lesser kudu's first birthday party, to taking the armadillos on an unexpected field trip experience where they dug their way through the Sunken Garden in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory.

"Knowing that people wanted to be at Como and couldn't really sparked creativity all over campus as we all came up with new ways of connecting the community to the live experiences and fun we were all craving," says Susannah Baudhuin, Creative Director of Como Friends, who documented everything from improvement projects to penguin parties for stories shared across the nonprofit's newsletters, emails and social media feeds. "We took a more intentional approach to storytelling to be transparent about the challenges that Como staffers were encountering, and also to show our followers that their support was making a difference at

Como every day, even if they weren't able to come and see it." As vaccines began to roll out, Como's free online reservation system—accessible in over 100 languages—helped to welcome more than 800,000 children and adults, nearly a half million more visitors than Como saw in 2020. But navigating the new normal also meant meeting up in new ways, for instance, offering both in-person and virtual options for Como Friends' annual Sunset Affair gala, a shift that made it possible to welcome a whole new audience of supporters to an event that's traditionally been sold out.

Como Friends' funding also helped to expand access to Como Connections, a popular video learning series created in collaboration with the St. Paul Public Schools. "Developing virtual programs like this has given us new opportunities to connect to classrooms in Greater Minnesota and others that wouldn't typically be able to come to Como," says Bekah Hanes, Como's Learning Experiences Coordinator. "While our educators are really excited to get back into classrooms with their students and to see those school buses full of kids on field trips, knowing that we have online programs in our back pocket means we have so many more options for the future."

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*"Please offer Como Connections again next year. We live in outstate Minnesota and cannot get our kids to Como. This brought Como to us." —second grade teacher*





## BUILDING COMMUNITY through new projects

In June 2021, Como Zoo unveiled Como Harbor, a \$21 million seals and sea lions habitat that got its start on the drawing board nearly a decade ago. “Because of the fast construction progress we made during the pandemic, it may have seemed that Como Harbor came together quickly,” says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha. “But in fact, our support for this improvement goes back many years, from the funding we provided to hire architects to create the original design plans, to years of advocacy work that helped secure \$15 million from the Minnesota State Legislature, to raising funds from individuals, corporations and foundations through the capital campaign. Together, we brought so many of Como Harbor’s most exciting features to life. Seeing the project we used to call ‘Sparky 2.0’ reshape the heart of Como Zoo is definitely one of our best accomplishments as an organization and as a Como community.”

While Como Harbor is a state-of-the-art habitat, it’s still free to every visitor—a commitment to access that’s always been key to Como Park Zoo and Conservatory’s character. “Ensuring that everyone can enjoy these improvements is always part of the conversation at Como,” says Campus Director Michelle Furrer. “It reflects not just our strong partnership with Como Friends and our donor community, but also the spirit of welcome and inclusion that’s always been part of Como’s history.”

Your support for Como Friends helped to continue that commitment in 2021, funding big improvements like the Aquatic Animals Building renovation now underway, to smaller ones like new species for the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s orchid collection, and trees for Tropical Encounters. “No matter the size or cost of the improvements that Como Friends funds,” says Sticha, “we’re always taking the long view and asking ourselves where we can invest to make Como better for every visitor today, and stronger for the long term.”

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*“Most anywhere else you go, extra money gives you better access to things. But here, everything you see is free to everyone. Every person who comes to Como has the same opportunity to learn and to grow. That’s why I’m so proud to watch the great things that are happening here, because we all benefit from it, and we’re all better off for it. I believe that if we want to fight inequities, we need to do more of what Como is doing.” —Minnesota State Senator John Marty*



*From big projects like the Aquatic Animals Building renovation, to smaller ones like better fencing for new wolves Nicky and Cerberus, your support for Como Friends helps bring visitors a little closer to nature.*





*“The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is one of my favorite places in the Twin Cities, and making visits there throughout the winter has been an important part of taking care of myself. I absolutely love drinking in the lush greenery, feeling the tension melt off my shoulders as the humid air fills my lungs while exploring the meandering paths of the Conservatory with friends and family.”* –Conservatory visitor, 2021



## BUILDING COMMUNITY *through plant care*

Horticulturists aren’t known for being big exhibitionists. “It’s definitely a profession that’s often suited to introverts. There’s a reason many of us prefer to work with plants,” Horticulture Supervisor Karen Kleber-Diggs (pictured on the right) says with a chuckle. But in 2021, many of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s quietest and most creative horticulturists pushed past their comfort zones to share their love of plants and gardening with thousands of online viewers following Como’s live Facebook feed. From taking virtual viewers on dozens of in-depth tours of favorite gardens and collections, to nominating their favorite specimens for Como’s first-ever Cutest Plant Contest, Como’s horticulturists helped shine a light on the healing and hopeful power of plants. “During a time when people couldn’t get to Como as often as they used to, we did our best to bring as much of what was happening at the Conservatory out to the public,” she says.

As the community searched for fun outdoor opportunities, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory responded by putting extra resources into all of Como’s exterior gardens, restor-

ing the Enchanted Garden, the Exedra, and the Frog Pond, and reviving the Gates Ajar mosaiculture, which had been put on hold during 2020. Your support for Como Friends also helped horticulturists continue the transformation of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden, the final destination for the COVID-friendly one-way walking path. “Over and over we heard from visitors how great the gardens looked and how much their visits meant to them,” says recently retired Horticulture Curator Tina Dombrowski.

To continue to boost Como’s curb appeal, the horticultural team grew more than 18,000 annual plants for use around the grounds and in Como’s popular Pollinator Garden all from existing seed inventory—a sustainability effort that reduced new seed and plant plug purchases by 85 percent. Support from Como Friends in 2021 also helped to purchase a new electric-powered utility vehicle, providing needed equipment for the horticulturists, cutting the carbon footprint of Como’s gardening operations, and modeling the value of conservation to Como’s plant-loving public.

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*“It’s such a pleasure to talk to the staff at the Conservatory—they are so well informed and interesting but never intrusive. I have learned so much from your staff and really appreciate all they do to maintain this beautiful space. So thank you, each of you, and for all you do.”*  
—Conservatory visitor, 2021





## BUILDING COMMUNITY *through animal care*

At 16 feet, Skeeter the giraffe stands taller than any other animal at Como Zoo—a height that posed serious challenges to keepers and veterinarians trying to prepare the 12-year-old male for hoofclaw surgery in 2021. “The problem with putting a giraffe under anesthesia is that they fall over like a tree,” says Jill Erzar, Skeeter’s favorite hoofstock keeper. But with the help of Como Zoo’s new veterinary technician, Andrea Persson, Como’s long-standing partners at the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine, and expert farriers and giraffe keepers flown in from around the country, “we put together a team that was the best of the best of the best to plan ahead for every complication we could foresee,” she says.

Helping Como Zoo provide best practice veterinary care has always been a top investment priority at Como Friends, which funded Como Zoo’s shift to operant conditioning animal training more than 20 years ago, positive reinforcement that’s helped build extraordinary bonds between keepers and the animals in their care. Those connections paid off in myriad ways in 2021 as Como Zoo managed complex care

for animals like Skeeter, helped new arrivals like polar bears Nan and Kulu adjust to their new surroundings, and worked to prepare dozens of animals to cooperate with receiving their COVID-19 vaccinations in the months ahead. The training program also helped Como Zoo earn a new round of accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, an accomplishment recognizing exceptional animal care that Como has achieved consistently since 1984.

Your support for Como Friends is critical to this work, helping to provide for fun enrichment experiences for animals like Markisa the orangutan, and specialized equipment like the diving gear that’s helping Como’s Life Support staff keep Como Harbor’s extensive saltwater pools clean and healthy. Support from the community also helps equip keepers like Erzar with the resources needed to provide extraordinary care to the animals we all love. “Skeeter’s surgery was the best and worst day of my career,” Erzar says now. “The worst, because we had to watch him fall down. The best, because we got to watch him get back on his feet again.”

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*“Thank you to all who keep our Como Zoo up and running smoothly, and especially caring for these beautiful animals! I appreciate the goodness, kindness and professionalism that keeps all of Como Zoo’s animals happy and healthy. We need this Zoo to stay with us for generations to come.”*

*—Como Friends supporter*

Polar bear photo by Zookeeper Kristin



*“Support from Como Friends gave my staff the access to do some remarkable things, and fully realize their dreams, not just to work with animals here in the zoo, but also out in the wild. That’s been pretty spectacular.”*

*—John Dee, Como Zoo’s recently retired Animal Curator*



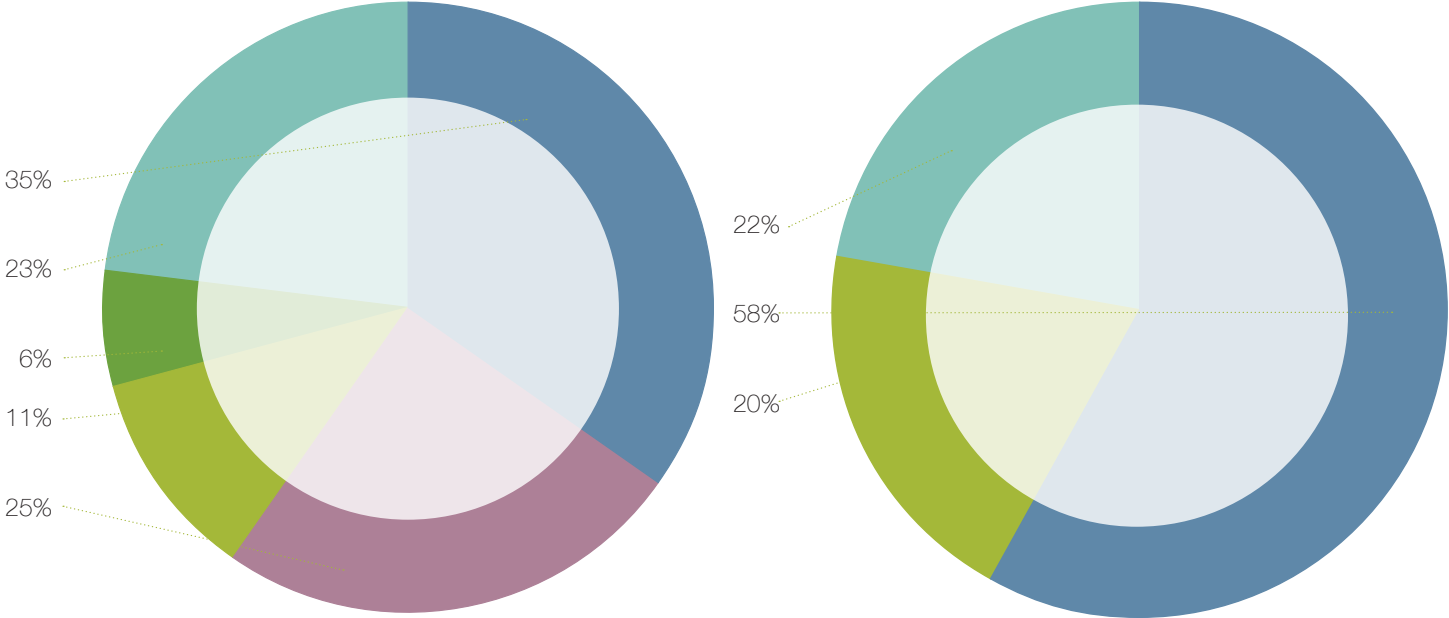


Statements of Financial Position

As of December 31,	2021	2020
ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Cash	\$ 2,345,457	\$ 1,376,918
Cash—Board Funds	1,617,719	1,460,889
Bequests Receivable	14,000	51,500
Contributions Receivable	300,400	357,175
Inventory	233,000	283,333
Prepaid Expenses and Other	50,522	49,865
Total Current Assets	4,561,098	3,579,680
OTHER		
Contributions Receivable, Net of Current Portion	247,843	548,597
Property and Equipment, Net	101,634	108,795
Beneficial Interests in Assets Held by Others	11,020,416	9,308,305
Total Other Assets	11,369,893	9,965,697
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 15,930,991	\$ 13,545,377
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Accounts Payable	\$ 190,271	\$ 7,719
Accrued Expenses and Other Liabilities	74,021	86,775
Total Current Liabilities	264,292	94,494
NET ASSETS		
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions		
Board Designated Reserve and Project Funds	1,631,719	1,512,389
Board Designated Endowment	164,382	142,611
Undesignated	1,824,140	901,165
Total Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	3,620,241	2,556,165
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions		
Perpetual in Nature	7,317,780	7,034,094
Purpose Restrictions	4,061,112	3,454,797
Time-Restricted for Future Periods	667,566	405,827
Total Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	12,046,458	10,894,718
Total Net Assets	15,666,699	13,450,883
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$ 15,930,991	\$ 13,545,377



Statements of Activities



Sources of Revenue

Individual Giving	\$1,651,011
Gift Shop Revenue (less cost of goods sold)	\$1,172,859
Corporate and Foundation Giving (excluding Capital Campaign)	\$523,436
Events	\$294,118
Investment and Other Income	\$1,077,213

Program and Mission Support

Program Support	\$2,127,069
Mission Support Management Expense	\$716,441
Mission Support Fundraising Expense	\$811,051



# THANK YOU 2021 DONORS!

*Como Friends' mission is to inspire community generosity  
in support of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory so it  
thrives for generations to come.*

## **\$200,000 +**

Manitou Fund  
Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation  
Woodland Park Zoological Society

## **\$100,000-\$199,999**

Anonymous

## **\$50,000-\$99,999**

Ecolab Foundation  
Bill and Diane Ellis  
E.M. Pearson Foundation Endowment  
Fund of Como Friends  
Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc.  
Xcel Energy

## **\$15,000-\$49,999**

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## **\$10,000-\$14,999**

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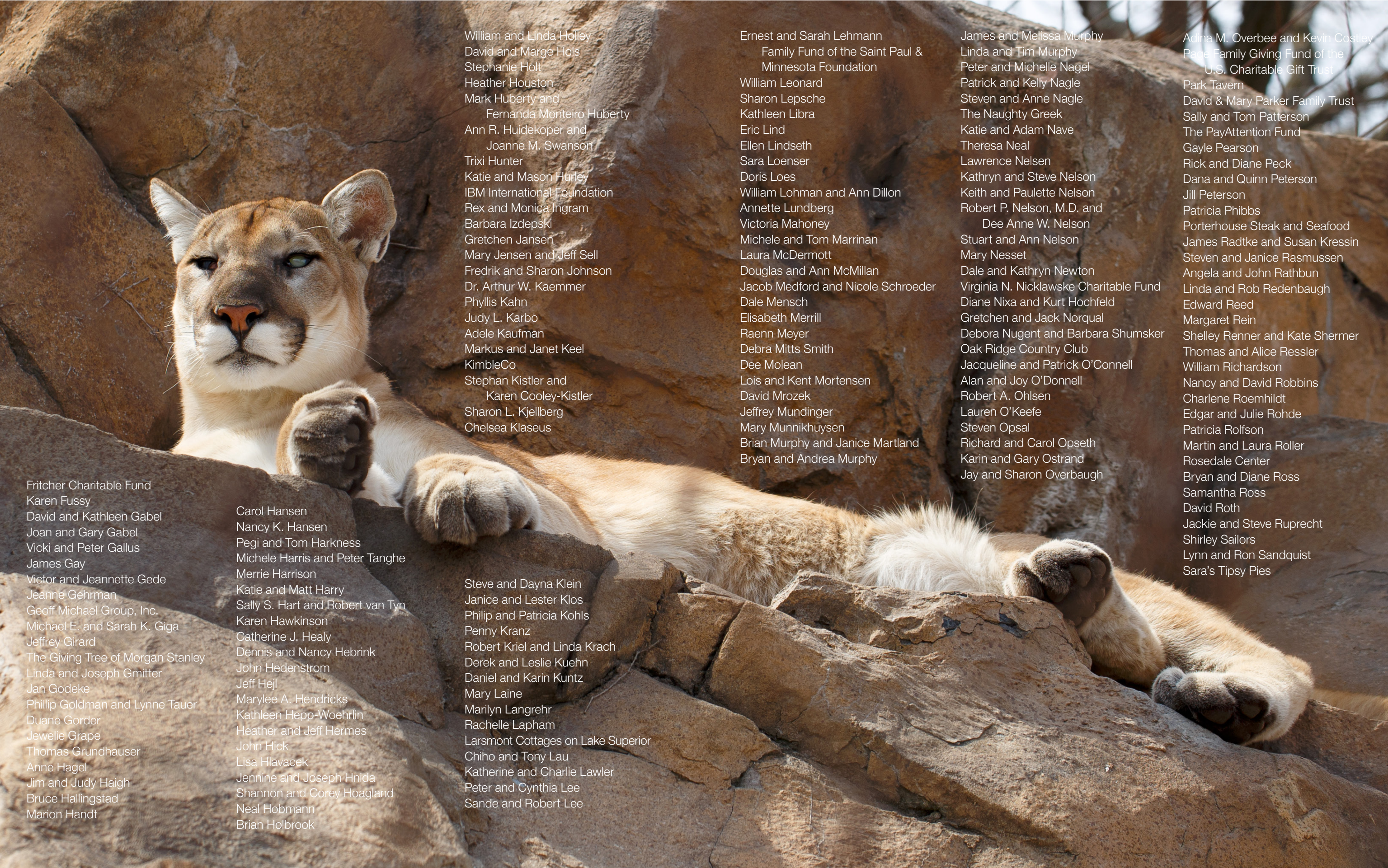
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