

C O M O F R I E N D S

# INSIDER

Summer 2023 | Volume 25 | Number 3



## Aquatic Ambassadors

*With your support, Como Zoo is protecting polar bears, penguins and puffins here at home, and around the world*

Photo by Zookeeper Kristin Riske

TICKETS AVAILABLE FOR SUNSET AFFAIR: STARGAZING!



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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.

PRESIDENT OF COMO FRIENDS: Jackie Sticha

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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.



DIRECTOR OF PARKS AND RECREATION: Andy Rodriguez

### COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY

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

### COMO FRIENDS INSIDER

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## COMO NEWS & EVENTS

### EVERYONE'S WILD ABOUT COMO QUEST

*This spring, Como Friends offered two versions of Como Quest!*



Our first-ever Como Quest for the 21-and-up crowd was a wild night of fun, with 62 teams competing to finish the Conservation Quest scavenger hunt. From spirited beverages and conversation to inspiring conservation talks from Como's talented team of educators, horticulturists and zookeepers, Como Quest guests told us they loved learning more about nature while supporting a great cause. **Don't miss the fall edition on October 5!**

Como Quest for the kids was a morning of unforgettable adventure, memorable moments and hands-on activities as teams learned more about the extraordinary plants and animals at Como. **Plan ahead and mark September 23 and 24 on your calendar for the next offering.**

Visit: [comofriends.org/events/como-quest](https://comofriends.org/events/como-quest) for more information.

*Special thanks to Sunrise Banks and JonnyPops for their sponsorship and tasty contributions!*





# COMO NEWS & EVENTS



## Como Friends Members Get More

Take a free ride at Como Town when you become a Como Friends member! Supporters at the \$150 annual level and above receive a complimentary Como Town Fun Card good for 32 points toward family-friendly rides like the Tiger Trax, the Traffic Jam and the Tilt-a-Whirl. A family tradition of fun, **Como Town is open Wednesdays through Sundays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.**

## LEAVE A LEGACY

A world-class natural wonder in the heart of the city, Como Park Zoo & Conservatory has welcomed five generations of Minnesota families. When you include Como Friends in your estate plan, you're leaving a legacy to ensure that Como has the resources it needs to welcome, educate, and inspire future generations. **For more information contact Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving at [laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org](mailto:laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org) or 651-487-8296.**



# COMO NEWS & EVENTS



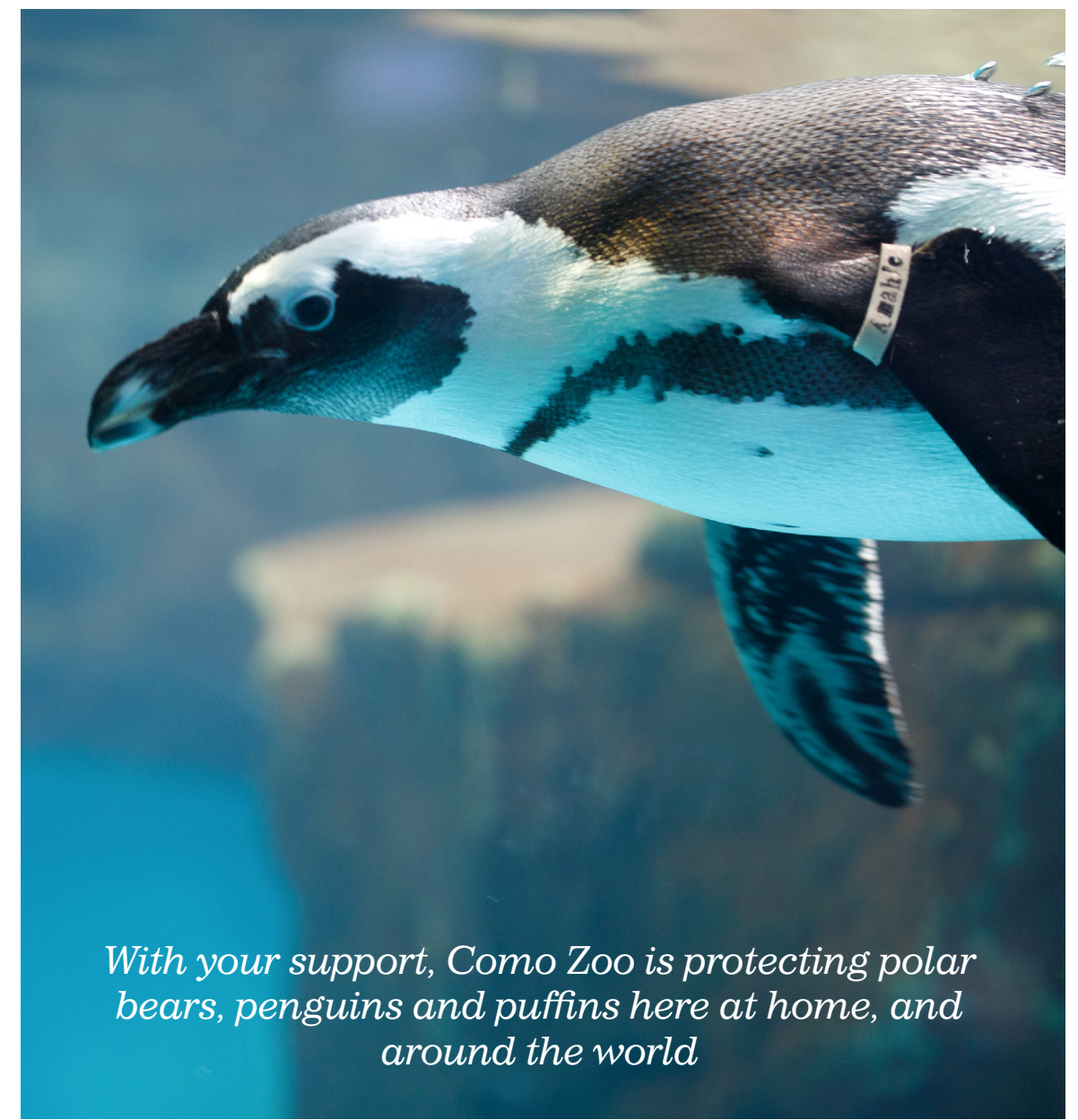
From the north pole to the south, and every compass point in between, the beauty and diversity of our planet is as boundless as the stars above. Join Como Friends as we gather again under the night sky for **Sunset Affair: Stargazing**, a benefit to celebrate the animals, plants and people that make Como Park Zoo & Conservatory a natural wonder. **Tickets to Como Friends' summer gala are going fast.** Visit [comofriends.org/events/sunset-affair](https://comofriends.org/events/sunset-affair) to make your reservation to this not-to-be-missed premier event!



## DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

Did you know that more than \$4 billion in charitable matching gifts go unclaimed every year? Make sure every dollar you donate to Como Friends is going as far as it can by visiting our Employer Match page at [comofriends.org](https://comofriends.org) to see if your workplace has a matching gift program. Nearly two-thirds of all Fortune 500 companies double, triple and even quadruple the donations their employees make to their favorite nonprofits. With your help, we can do even more to help Como Park Zoo & Conservatory thrive!





Polar bears, penguins and puffins are the star players at this summer's *Sunset Affair: Stargazing*, Como Friends' popular summer gala. The benefit, held on July 20, helps to support everything at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory, including conservation projects and professional development experiences that allow Como Zoo's keepers to expand their knowledge and their networks well beyond Como's campus. Here's a look at some of Como Zoo's aquatic animal ambassadors, and the important conservation work your contributions help to make possible every day.



**POLAR PARTNERS:** As a long-time supporter of the conservation group Polar Bears International, Como Zoo has had the opportunity to send several zookeepers to Churchill, Manitoba, to see polar bears up close and to teach tourists about polar bears' natural behaviors. This year, keeper Kristin Riske will go as part of the PBI Climate Alliance Program, an eight-month course that empowers educators, keepers, aquarists and others to share effective messaging about the impact of climate change. "We're working with the National Network for Ocean Climate Change Interpretation to learn the best ways to talk to guests about what's happening in the Arctic," says Riske, who will meet regularly with a working group

before making a trip to Churchill to see polar bears in action. "I get to work with Neil, Nan and Kulu every day, but seeing polar bears in the wild will be brand new to me."

**NEW PENGUIN PAIRING:** Penguins are social animals, and the partnerships they forge with their mates can last a lifetime. With the recent arrival of two male penguins, Casey and Joshua, Como Zoo keepers hoped that 4-year-old Amahle, a single female, would finally find a mate. "We'd hoped they might form a trio, but that's not likely to happen," says Como Zoo Senior Keeper Allison Jungheim. "She chose Casey, and now Joshua is the odd man out."

In the Aquatic Animals Building, Como Zoo's keepers keep a close eye on penguin politics and power plays—the same behavior keeper Kelley Dinsmore observed on a recent Conservation Champions trip to Cape Town. As a volunteer with the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), Dinsmore worked with a project that rehabilitates African penguin chicks that have been abandoned by their parents. That connection continued during the pandemic in 2020, with a contribution to SANCCOB by Como Friends. "Even though conservation travel plans were cancelled during the pandemic, Como Friends was still able to support species preservation projects that Como has been involved with and that our keepers really care about," says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends.



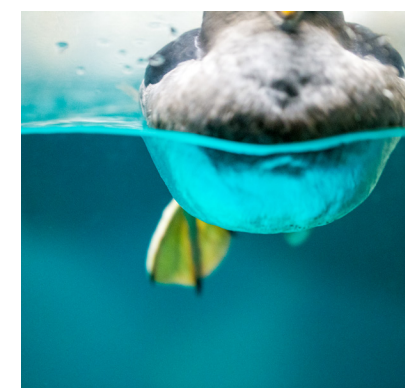
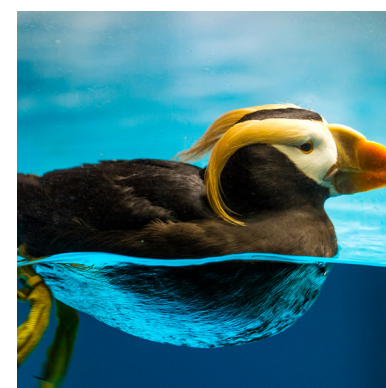
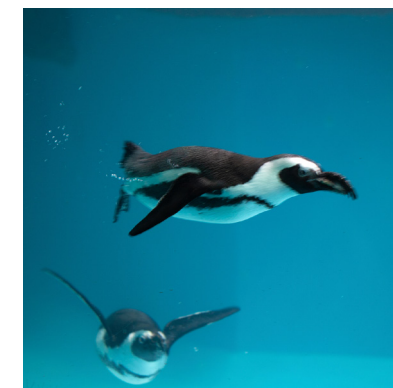
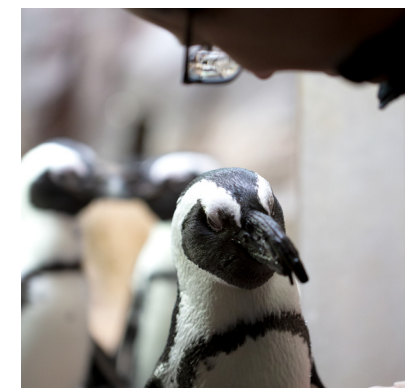
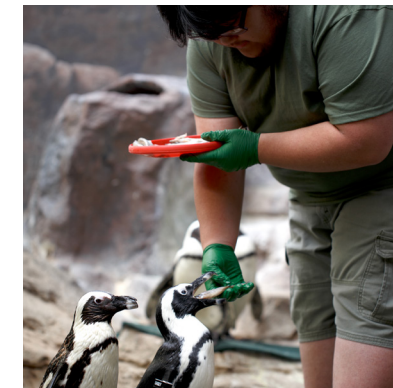
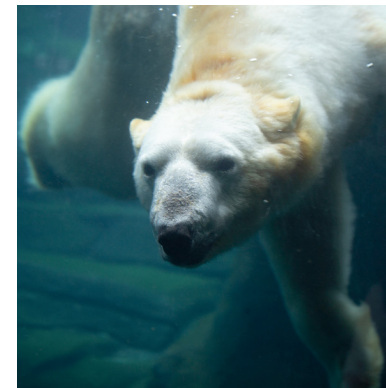


**PUFFIN PACK:** With a new phase of construction underway in Como's Aquatic Animals Building, Como's three puffins have been living behind the scenes this season, awaiting their return to their rocky pool later this summer. "They're high stress birds, so we don't want them to have to endure loud noises and jack-hammering," says keeper Melanie Haut. "But we've taken advantage of the construction time to do some maintenance and masonry work in their habitat, so everything will be nice and pretty when Frenchie, Bug and Stanley are ready to come back."

With help from a recent Como Friends' Conservation Champions grant, Haut was able to learn even more about the amazing birds in her care by vol-

unteering with the National Audubon Society's Project Puffin, a seabird restoration effort that has helped revive puffin populations on several islands off the coast of Maine where they had been eliminated by hunting more than a century ago. "It's a real conservation success story, and one of the best things about it is that they now have more than 30 years of data on these birds and their environment, including ocean temperatures and current, when they fledge, and what kind of fish they're eating," Haut explains. Those findings are helping scientists see how factors like ocean warming or overfishing can impact many layers of biological relationships—from fish, to birds, to humans.

*"We're working with the National Network for Ocean Climate Change Interpretation to learn the best ways to talk to guests about what's happening in the Arctic," says Riske, who will meet regularly with a working group before making a trip to Churchill to see polar bears in action. "I get to work with Neil, Nan and Kulu every day, but seeing polar bears in the wild will be brand new to me."*





A gift from St. Paul's sister city of Nagasaki, Japan, the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden has had a long and colorful history, welcoming everyone from gardening fans to foreign dignitaries for more than 40 years.

But in many ways, the sansui garden design first imagined by acclaimed landscape artist Masami Matsuda is just getting started.

*"A Japanese garden is a living work of art, so it's different every time you visit," says lead gardener and Como horticulturist Jessica Rooney. "But it takes time and patience to establish a garden like this. And after 40 years, it feels to me like the garden is really coming into its own."*

Since its opening in 1979, Como's Japanese Garden, named in memory of long-time Como supporter Charlotte Partridge Ordway, has undergone several renovations, including a 1991 effort led by Matsuda-san himself, a ninth-generation landscape architect from Nagasaki. Since the completion of The Ordway Gardens wing in 2013, funded with contributions from Como Friends supporters, a whole new generation has been discovering this once hidden treasure. With the help of internationally-known Japanese garden consultant Jon Powell, and a \$1 million endowment created by Como Friends supporters to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, the garden has been meticulously groomed, pruned and managed to reflect Matsuda-san's original design plan, which he captured in a watercolor painting that gardeners like Rooney continue to refer to.

*"Achieving the original vision for the garden requires you to put your own ego aside, as you should daily, which is also one of the goals of a Japanese garden," says Rooney. "My role is to make sure that the mood, the scale, the training of the shrubs and trees, all reflect that intended design."*



*A new master plan—and a major gift to Como Friends—are helping to transform the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden for a new chapter*

## GROWING BEAUTY



This season, Como visitors will notice a new perimeter fence, creating an even more intimate experience for visitors while buffering views and noise from the Conservatory's behind-the-scenes growing facilities. The first project in an updated master plan for the garden, the new fence, along with a new irrigation system and a host of other improvements, will be made possible by a significant donation to Como Friends provided by an anonymous couple. This donation is making it possible to quickly advance items from the master plan rather than slowly making improvements as funding became available. Watch for updates and improvements every time you visit as Como executes planned improvements in the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden.

*"One of the truly beautiful aspects of philanthropy is that it allows people to make meaningful contributions to the places that filled their lives, ensuring that the next generation gets the same opportunities," says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. "As a public institution with a limited budget, Como would typically have to make improvements like this incrementally. But the impact of this extraordinary private gift means that Como has the resources to move quickly and make improvements faster, so that we can all enjoy them even sooner. We're so grateful to the donors for their generous gift and for the immediate impact it will have at Como."*

For a Japanese garden enthusiast like Rooney, it's no surprise that Como's community has been so generous in its support of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden over the years. "Every person I encounter in the garden has their own stories, their own interpretation, and their own memories of this space," she says. "The garden is filled with so much history, and if you've received something from the garden, it's natural to want to give back, whether in a donation, time as a volunteer, or just appreciation and gratitude that it's here."

**The right tools:** Japanese gardens demand meticulous daily care, nearly all of which is done by hand. These specialized bamboo hand tools help Como's horticulturists and volunteer gardeners weed, whisk away fallen pine needles, and pull spent blooms out of view for visitors. Support for Como Friends helps to provide for both the tools and the professional training horticulturists rely on to keep the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden in top form every day.

**Pruned to perfection:** Creating a harmonious scale between plants, rocks, shrubs and trees is one of the design goals of Japanese gardening. This stand of pine trees near one of the garden's prime vantage points has been pruned nearly every year to keep them in the right proportions.

**Authentic details:** Everything in a Japanese garden is intentional, including the shape and form of the props and fencing that appear throughout the garden. "There's even a special approach to knot-tying that we rely on to maintain that authenticity," says Rooney. Como Friends' contributions help to support the mentorship Como's horticulturists receive from Japanese Garden consultant Jon Powell, helping the sansui garden earn recognition as a "rising star" among public Japanese gardens.





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### *Polar bears, penguins & puffins!*

With Garden Safari Gifts' great array of Como-themed apparel, you can wear your love of animals right on your sleeve. On your next visit, dive into Como Friends' gift shop to find hats, tees, pjs, plush and more featuring some of your favorite aquatic ambassadors and featured players at the upcoming Sunset Affair: Stargazing gala. **Remember, Como Friends members enjoy 15 percent off every purchase!**

