



como friends  
THRIVE ON

Summer 2024 | Volume 26 | Number 3

# INSIDER



Photo by Susannah Baudhuin

Como Zoo's Wild World  
*Your contributions help support  
great animal care during the year's  
busiest season*

| Mark your calendars for Sunset Affair: Our Wild World and other fundraising and Special Access events at Como! |

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  - Visitor Services:** ..... 651.487.8201
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### COMO PARK ZOO & CONSERVATORY

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



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  
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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 FRIENDS INSIDER

**Art Direction & Design:** Susannah Baudhuin  
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## COMO NEWS & EVENTS

### COMO CONSTRUCTION UPDATES



**P**ardon our mess, but funding from Como Friends is being invested in some major repairs and improvements this season:

- 🏗️ With nearly forty million pairs of feet trodding the floor of the Visitor Center since 2005, it was time to resurface it for future use. Como Friends' funding made it possible to update flooring at Como's front door, adding a terrazzo surface at the entrance and golden stain to the floors throughout the Visitor Center.
- 🏗️ Como's Victoria water platters will take a pause this season to repair leaks on the south side of the

water gardens. Other repairs are now complete near the Centennial Garden, which will be filled with aquatic plants later this season.

- 🏗️ Como's gentle herd of giraffes have a new shade structure in the African hoofstock habitat thanks to your contributions.
- 🏗️ Plans to replace aging elevators and improve access to the Sunken Garden have been approved and a new ramp design plan in Minnesota's most beautiful room is now out for bid.



## BE A FRIEND AND SPONSOR COMO'S ANIMALS OR GARDENS

Make your charitable giving a little more personal by sponsoring the animals or gardens you care about most at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory. Sponsorships make great gifts for any occasion and include an animal plush or a set of Marjorie McNeely Conservatory note cards.

When you sponsor Mumford the lion, the Palm Dome, or any of the animals or gardens at Como, your gift helps provide enrichment and veterinary care for all the Zoo's animals, replenished plant and tree collections for the Conservatory's gardens, and free admission for everyone, every day of the year.

To learn more about Animal & Garden Sponsorships go to: [comofriends.org/support/sponsorship/animal/](https://comofriends.org/support/sponsorship/animal/)



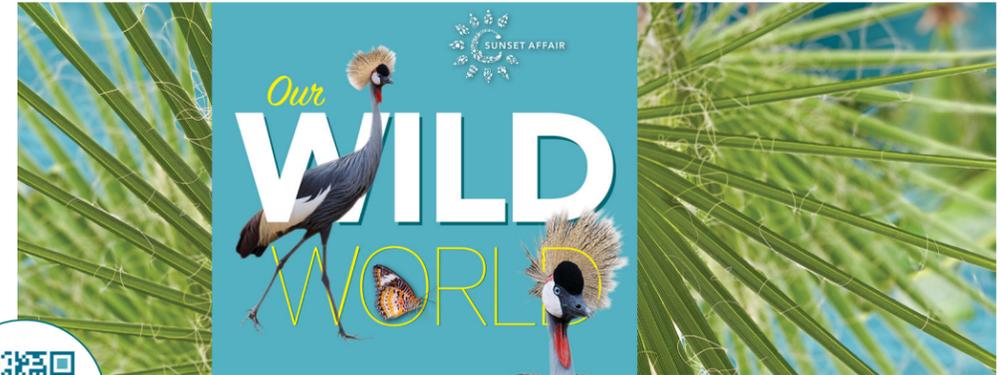
## LEAVE A LEGACY

A Minnesota tradition for more than 125 years, coming to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory is a memory that connects across generations. Help keep this legacy thriving by making a planned gift to support the wild and precious plants and animals that inspire us and sustain the free admission that makes Como accessible to all visitors.

For more information on planned giving, contact Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving at [laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org](mailto:laurel.lundberg@comofriends.org) | 651-487-8296



From Special Access Events for Como Friends' supporters to fabulous fundraisers like Sunset Affair, keep your Como social calendar up to date by visiting Como Friends' Events page.



## JOIN COMO FRIENDS AT SUNSET AFFAIR: OUR WILD WORLD

At Sunset Affair: Our Wild World, you'll experience Como with a new perspective with an evening filled with moments of discovery and captivating facts about the natural world to inspire expressions of "that's so wild!"

The festivities will include fascinating talks from Como Zoo's keepers and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's horticulturists, and the chance to bid on the amazing, only-at-Como silent auction items that have made Como Friends' gala summer's hottest ticket for more than two decades.

Tickets are still available. To reserve yours today, scan the QR Code above or go to [comofriends.org/events/sunset-affair](https://comofriends.org/events/sunset-affair) to purchase tickets online, or call Como Friends at 651-487-8229.

## SUNSET AFFAIR FUND-A-MISSION

Make a gift today and help us unlock a generous \$50,000 match from The Manitou Fund!



Your contributions to Sunset Affair make an immediate impact every day at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory, protecting and preserving all the wild and precious plants and animals in Como's care. From pruning the soaring palm trees in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's Palm Dome, to updating the habitat where our family of orangutans likes to hang, to providing bus scholarships that remove economic barriers for classrooms in need, every gift helps fulfill our conservation mission and bring visitors closer to nature.



[comofriends.org/events/sunset-affair/fund-a-need/](https://comofriends.org/events/sunset-affair/fund-a-need/)



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# COMO ZOO'S WILD WORLD



*Your contributions help support great animal care during the year's busiest season*

"Our Wild World" is the theme of Como Friends' summer gala, Sunset Affair, coming on July 18. But it's always a wild world at Como Zoo, especially during the busy summer season when visitor and animal encounters are at their peak.

Your support for Como Friends helps to make it all happen, from protecting the free admission that welcomes nearly 1.8 million visitors a year, to promoting Nature Walk, the teen volunteers who talk up the value of conservation with thousands of visitors every day. Behind the scenes, one of the most important things private contributions make possible is the state-of-the-art veterinary care that supports more than 1,200 animals at Como Zoo.

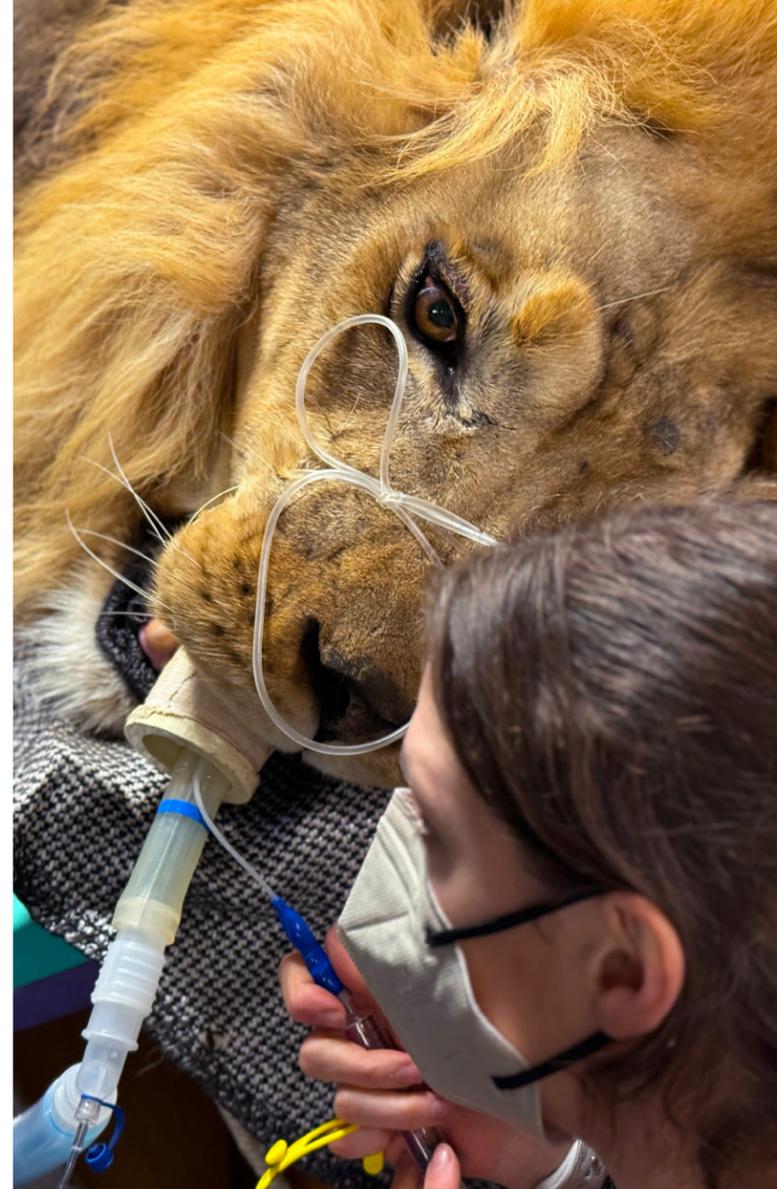
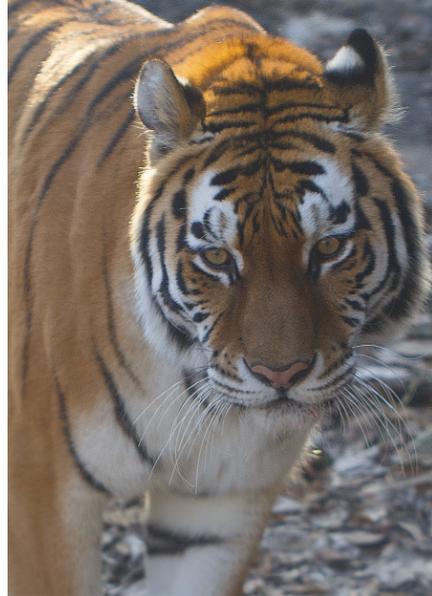
"Twenty years ago, one of Como Friends' early investments was supporting the positive reinforcement training that's helped to build extraordinary bonds of trust between keepers and animals, and encouraged animals to be part of their own health care," says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. "Now we're helping to elevate animal care by investing in the equip-

ment that makes it possible to provide specialized veterinary care and diagnostic capabilities right here at Como Zoo. It's all part of a continuum of animal care improvements that have been made possible through the generosity of Como Friends supporters, many of whom we know are very dedicated animal lovers."

Here's a look at the veterinary care taking place behind the scenes at Como Zoo thanks to your support for Como Friends:

## **X-RAY VISION**

Como Friends funding recently allowed Como Zoo to purchase an on-site x-ray machine, equipment that was put to good use this spring when Mutambi, the gray crowned crane, injured her wing after an unexpected encounter with one of the zebras that shares her habitat. Como's on-site vet team flew into action, using the x-ray machine to ensure that her wing was reset correctly, and returning her to the comfort of her African habitat within hours. Now fully healed, she's part of a critical breeding plan to help preserve this endangered species.



### KEEPING TIGER MATING TAME

Experts from the Tiger Species Survival Plan think Como Zoo's male tiger, Tsar, and Bernadette, a female who recently came to Como from the Oregon Zoo, would make a great match. But after a few months of behind-the-scenes meet and greets, the two tigers are still taking things slow.

In fact, that's the strategy that large cat keepers Hans Jorgensen and Caitlin Alessi have been sticking to since Bernadette made the move to Como Zoo a few months ago. Since tigers can be ferocious with each other—even their mates—keepers have been keeping their encounters as short and positive as possible. Solitary by nature, tigers are the rare breed of animal that depends on induced ovulation, which means that females don't release their eggs until after successful breeding behavior has taken place.

While Bernadette showed signs of being in estrus earlier this spring, and the pair have successfully copulated on multiple days, keepers continue to keep a close eye on their interactions. "Even a few months after being introduced, there's still risk involved, so we monitor their behaviors closely both when they're together and when they're separated," says Alessi. While there's no predicting if the pair will have success, tiger gestation typically takes just 100 days. "Will there be cubs? We can't say at this point," says Jorgensen. "But they both appear to be receptive to the possibility."

### MEETING MEDUSA

Moving to a new habitat is never easy, but Medusa, an 8-year-old gray seal who recently arrived at Como Zoo, is facing some extra challenges. Rescued off the coast of Long Island when she was just a three-month-old pup, Medusa is blind and was rehabilitated at the Aquarium of Niagara, where she also underwent cataract surgery. Brought to Como Zoo as a breeding companion for Wally the gray seal, who also has limited vision, keepers are working hard to build her confidence and curiosity at Como Harbor this summer.

"She's sweet and gentle and really smart, so as we build a relationship where she trusts us, we can move her toward discovering more of Como Harbor," says aquatics keeper Kelley Dinsmore (pictured on the previous page). "Right now, she has no idea there's more water out beyond her pool, so we'll have to get her comfortable with her surroundings a little bit at a time." While her previous keepers taught her several verbal training cues, Como's keepers are teaching her to transition to the combination of verbal and tactile training cues used with the other six residents of Como Harbor, including Wally, sea lions Subee, Poppy and Niko, and harbor seals Kash and Kilian.

Her mythological name, originally bestowed by the rehabilitation center that found her, may be a little misleading. "She won't turn you to stone," Dinsmore says, "but she will melt your heart."

### NOSING AROUND

Mumford the lion suffers from occasional nose bleeds, a problem keepers noticed was growing in frequency. But a recent health check with Como's on-site vets revealed the root of the cause—a cluster of vascular tissue near the tip of his right nostril that gets irritated, particularly when he bumps it against the mesh of the exhibit.

To rule out bigger health problems, the lion underwent his first full physical exam since arriving at Como Zoo in 2019. The procedure allowed vets and keepers to do a complete work-up on the 8-year-old male, including a careful dental exam. "His mouth is so big, and his teeth are so big that it was a big undertaking," says Jorgensen. "The veterinary dental team told us that with a house cat, it usually takes 10 x-ray plates to view the cat's whole mouth, but with Mumford, it took 50!"

### MEET WES SIMS, COMO ZOO'S DIRECTOR OF ANIMAL CARE AND HEALTH

With fewer than 15 acres of habitats, Como Zoo is a small zoo by most standards. But with more than 1,200 animals, including great apes, polar bears, and large cats, Como Zoo manages animal care challenges comparable to zoos several times its size.

That's why Wes Sims, Como Zoo's new director of animal care and health, has a to-do list that takes him across Como's campus several times every day. "Fortunately, I can get from one end to the next in three minutes, and there's a lot of variety to my days," says Sims, who came to Como in late 2023 after serving in previous animal curator and keeper positions at the Tulsa Zoo, Alabama's Birmingham Zoo, and Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden. On a typical day, he might oversee habitat repairs and improvements, like the new shade structures installed in the African hoofstock habitat; manage hiring and human resource decisions at the Zoo; and consult with Como's vet team about emerging animal care needs.

Sims says he's impressed by Como Zoo's keepers, and the diversity of species they care for in a small space. But he's also impressed by the diversity of Como's audience, and the deep sense of nostalgia visitors have for Como Park Zoo & Conservatory. "Having free admission really seems like it's been the key to making Como so inclusive, which is probably our greatest strength," he says. "It's a tradition that the community is very proud of."



## Support from Como Friends is helping the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory tackle a busy summer to-do list

**🌴 Palm pruning:** Visitors to the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory's historic Palm Dome may notice something different this season—a lot more sunlight. The brighter feel of the room is the result of an extensive pruning project supported by Como Friends that required the removal of several old palm trees that had grown so tall they were crowding into the glass cupola. Unlike species that can be trimmed to grow outward, “the growing point of a palm tree is at the top of the plant, so the pressure of pushing into the glass would eventually kill the tree,” explains Karen Kleber Diggs, horticultural supervisor. New palms, also provided with funding from Como Friends, will take their place as part of a phased succession plan visitors will see in the coming months. While gardeners are always sorry to see 20-year-old trees go away, the extra space has allowed horticulturist Alejandro Balderas to redesign the understory of the palm room. “He’s been utilizing a lot of our bromeliad and orchid collection to create these colorful accent points he calls vignettes that bring a new focal point to the ground cover space,” says Kleber Diggs. “He’s seeing things in that room with fresh eyes, which is something our visitors may notice this season, too.”

**🌸 The Summer Flower Show:** Cherry red and pink annuals have given a big pop of color to Minnesota’s most beautiful room this season. The longest-running flower show of the year, the Summer Flower Show, supported with your contributions to Como Friends, features angelonia, petunias, begonias, impatiens, coleus, salvia and verbena through September 22.

**🌳 Tree planting:** Funding from Como Friends has been helping to provide for a steady pace of new tree plantings around Como’s outside spaces, keeping visitors cool and keeping Como’s critical tree canopy healthy.

**🌿 Water gardens return:** Recent repairs to the water garden in front of the Visitor Center will make it possible to bring back more native aquatic plants this season. And, Como’s popular Victoria water platters will have more room to grow and thrive when each of the pools of the aquatic garden display are filled once again this season.

**🌱 More native plantings:** The Minnesota Garden that greets visitors at Como’s front door will be even more Minnesotan this season with the phased planting of a host of new native plants like rattlesnake master, prairie dropseed, false indigo and prairie alumroot. “We’ll be doing mostly prairie and oak savanna plants, which are great for pollinators and wildlife,” says horticulturist Marie Day, noting that the Minnesota Garden inspires lots of visitor questions about what to plant in our own backyards. “Highlighting our native plants is educational for visitors, but these plants also tend to be lower maintenance and more drought tolerant as well.”

**🌈 Minnesota mosaiculture:** Minnesota’s new state flag and seal are the inspiration behind this season’s Gates Ajar, the traditional mosaiculture feature Como gardeners have created for more than a century. Since sky blue is a hard color to come by in the plant world, designer Marie Day plans to highlight the new flag’s bold contrasts with a mix of colorful alternanthera and echeveria, a fast-growing succulent. Installing this year’s display of more than 5,000 annuals and 300 bedding plants required more than 100 gardener hours, while maintaining it typically requires 45 minutes or more of watering every day. “It’s a big project and an important tradition,” says Day. “Every year, our goal is to make it a little more creative, and a little more surprising.”



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**Locations:** in the Visitor Center and throughout Como Park Zoo & Conservatory

**Phone:** 651.487.8222  
[comofriends.org](http://comofriends.org)



### *Our Wild World*

Bring home a few of your favorite summer memories with Garden Safari Gifts' array of wild and wonderful gifts and souvenirs. From Como-themed apparel and beverage holders, to hand-carved animals, picture books, puzzles and plush, shopping at Como Friends' gift shop is a great way to support "Our Wild World" right at Como Park Zoo & Conservatory. **Remember, Como Friends members enjoy 15 percent off every purchase!**

