



como friends
THRIVE ON

...connecting through **COMO**

2022 | Annual Report

2022 Contribution to Como Park Zoo & Conservatory

total **contribution** | **\$1,891,015**

•••• COMO ZOO	\$407,750
Zookeeper Positions and Care for the Animals .....	..\$91,050
Aquatic Animals Building Renovation .....	..\$200,000
Design Plans for New Big Cat and Wolves Habitats .....	..\$75,000
New Flooring in Giraffe Habitat .....	..\$17,000
Raised Platform in Outside Gorilla Forest Habitat .....	..\$10,000
Blood Pressure Monitor and Vitals Monitor .....	..\$6,700
Polar Bear Odyssey Door Replacement .....	..\$3,000
New Speakers in Gorilla Forest .....	..\$3,500
Zookeeper Professional Training & Development .....	..\$1,500
•••• MARJORIE MCNEELY CONSERVATORY	\$408,671
Gardener Positions and Plant Care .....	..\$344,271
Technical Training for the Care of the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden .....	..\$27,900
Screens on the Windows in the Sunken Garden .....	..\$16,000
Sunken Garden Elevator Repairs and Update .....	..\$15,000
Portable Garden Watering Equipment .....	..\$5,500
•••• CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS	\$322,276
Como Harbor Seals and Sea Lions Habitat .....	..\$322,276
•••• COMO CAMPUS	\$281,550
Direct Support for the Care of the Animals and Gardens .....	..\$125,000
Visitor Center Staircase Removal .....	..\$80,000
Update and Replace Security Cameras .....	..\$40,000
Power Washer Equipment .....	..\$3,600
Visitor Survey to Identify Equity Needs .....	..\$20,000
New Golf Carts .....	..\$7,950
Como Campus Projects .....	..\$5,000
•••• CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION	\$438,018
Education Positions and Annual Operations .....	..\$71,200
Virtual Junior High Programs .....	..\$20,000
Virtual Statewide Elementary School Program .....	..\$15,000
Development of Guest Engagement Strategy .....	..\$316,818
Conservation Champions Projects and Partnerships .....	..\$15,000
•••• VOLUNTEER SERVICES	\$32,750
Staff Positions and Annual Operations .....	..\$31,000
Update to Volunteer Check-In Space .....	..\$1,750



•••• Dear **friends**,

After a four-year hiatus, Sparky the sea lion made a big come-back last spring, diving into a whole new narrative at Como Harbor, the \$21 million habitat she shares with pinnipeds Poppy, Niko, Stanley, Kash and Kilian. If you joined the crowds in the new KSTP Amphitheater, then you’ve seen that Subee, the rescued California sea lion who found safe harbor at Como after a shark attack, still embodies the spunky, splashy spirit of “Sparky,” a Como Zoo tradition since 1956. But now she shares the spotlight with all of Como Harbor’s inhabitants, highlighting the exceptional enrichment all of the seals and sea lions receive in Como’s care, while encouraging visitors to connect the dots between Como’s marine animals and their cousins in the sea.

Inspiring our community to connect to nature has been part of Como Park Zoo & Conservatory’s mission for more than 125 years. And thanks to your contributions to Como Friends, Como has the resources to make those connections even more meaningful and memorable for the next generation. From the front row of the SPIRE Sparky Show, to the return of fantastic, in-person interpretive experiences, to the expansion of innovative virtual programs like Como Connections, your support in 2022 made it possible for more than a million adults and children to reconnect to Como.

As the crowds continue their return, many are telling us how much they appreciate the ways we’re making our historic campus even more beautiful and inviting. Whether it’s improving the curb appeal of Como’s front door, providing way-finding signs in multiple languages for Como’s diverse audience, or making room for fascinating creatures like our new African serval, Lily, helping our community to connect to Como is at the core of nearly every investment Como Friends made in 2022. That includes Como Friends’ continued commitment to protecting Como’s free admission—an open-door policy that makes Como one of the most equitable institutions in the state.

It’s all possible because of the individuals, businesses, corporations and foundations whose generosity provides Como the extra care and funding it needs to thrive. Thank you for all you do to bring our community together at Como, helping us connect to the wonders of our natural world.

Jackie Sticha

Jackie Sticha
President
Como Friends

Steve Proeschel

Steve Proeschel
Board Chair
Como Friends Board of Directors



...connecting through generosity

“Like a lot of people who grew up here, I have core memories that are embedded at Como—coming here with my dad, visiting during school field trips. It’s always been the crown jewel of St. Paul, but seeing how this space has evolved since then is what’s really amazing to me. If Como were completely dependent on funding from the city, I don’t know if it could have progressed as much as it has. But because of the love people have for this place, and the time and resources provided by the people on Como Friends’ board over the years, and from volunteers in the community, Como is constantly improving. Como Friends is one of the oldest public/private partnerships around, and it’s become a model to so many other organizations, showing what’s possible when you work together.”

—Andy Rodriguez, Director, St. Paul Parks and Recreation



“After many decades of teaching high school, I decided that becoming a Como volunteer was going to be my retirement gift to myself. I went to my first training session in 2008 and I thought, ‘This is so much fun! It’s all of the best parts of teaching, with none of the stuff they have to pay you for.’ It was tough during the pandemic when the volunteer program was paused, but as soon as Como opened up, I was there as a visitor again. And if I heard anyone ask a question, or wonder about the animals, I couldn’t help myself—I’d lean over and say, ‘I bet I can answer that question.’ I called it pop-up volunteering! Now it’s wonderful that they’ve been able to bring all of us volunteers back to Como, and make those connections with visitors again.

“As a Como Friends member and donor, I feel proud of the ways that Como has evolved to put the emphasis on conservation and species preservation. And it’s heart-warming to see the relationship that keepers have with animals, knowing them as individuals, and seeing what their preferences are. Como is such a precious resource to this community, and the fact that it’s still free to anyone who wants to come is just amazing. It’s here for everyone who wants to learn.”

**—Barbara Bobrowitz, Community Volunteer,
Como Friends Donor**



Como Friends’ strategic plan connects philanthropy to one of Minnesota’s most beloved public institutions

- Generous support from Como Friends’ community of donors in 2022 helped us make progress on the three strategic priorities in our strategic plan:

strengthening Como Friends for growth and innovation

safeguarding free access and operational stability 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.



.... connecting through **equitable access**

Open every day of the year with no admission fee, Como Park Zoo & Conservatory has always been one of the most accessible institutions in the state. But with your support for Como Friends, we're finding even more ways to help our community connect to Como, from creating new virtual learning videos for middle school students, to relaunching Como's free public programs with a growing emphasis on fostering empathy with animals and plants.

"We know that nurturing those natural connections can inspire a life-long commitment to conservation, which is why Como Friends supporters may notice that we're finding new ways to highlight Como's conservation mission in our work as well," says Como Friends President Jackie Sticha. In

2022, the nonprofit unveiled a streamlined new website, with more in-depth storytelling that brings Como Friends supporters behind the scenes, with shareable posts about how Como's keepers and horticulturists do their work. This year, Como Friends also launched Como Quest, a next generation fundraiser that invites families and friend groups to fan out across Como Zoo and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory, learning more about Como's animals and plants through an immersive scavenger hunt experience.

As Como continued its transition to more traditional operations in 2022, your support also helped protect the free admission that matters most to our community, providing equitable access to more than a million children and adults.



"I've always liked that phrase from Jimmy Carter, 'We become not a melting pot, but a beautiful mosaic.' I think that's something you see every day at Como, the diversity of our visitors, people of all ages, bringing so many perspectives and experiences. But we all can remember the wonder we felt as kids, coming to the zoo or conservatory, and feeling the sense of awe about the beauty of nature."

As a Como Friends board member, I'm excited about the ways we're working to make sure that Como thrives for generations to come, and reflects the community in meaningful ways. Whether it's creating more virtual learning content for kids in junior high, or making pathways to recruit more diverse young people for careers in zookeeping and horticulture, Como Friends is focused on the future at the same time we're protecting the accessibility that's always been part of Como's history."

—Annie Huidekoper, Community Volunteer, Como Friends Board Member

... connecting through **projects and improvements**

One of the most visited destinations in the state, keeping Como Park Zoo & Conservatory's campus in top condition can be a daily challenge. **“Being open to the public—and to the elements—every day of the year can make for quite a lot of wear and tear and maintenance needs,”** says Como Director/Campus Manager, Michelle Furrer. **“One of the advantages of our strong public/private partnership with Como Friends is that community support can help Como finish projects and make improvements at a faster pace, so we can better serve our visitors.”**

Many improvements made in 2022 were easily evident to visitors, from the fantastic face-lift taking place in Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals Building, to

the arrival of new marine microhabitats, including a colorful new home for Como's tropical fish. Other Como Friends' funded projects may go unnoticed—but no less appreciated—by Como's crowds. That list includes updating the sound system so guests can hear what's happening in Gorilla Forest, replacing the doors in Polar Bear Odyssey to open more smoothly for the large number of people who visit the polar bears every year, and removing the unused staircase at Como's front entrance, to elevate the aesthetics around Como's gorgeous water gardens.

Your support for Como Friends makes a difference every day by creating new experiences for visitors, while caring for the extraordinary resources Como already has.



A visit to Como has been a special treat since I was a young child, and still wakes my sense of wonder.

–Como Park Zoo & Conservatory Visitor

I got married in the Sunken Garden and could hear the lions roaring and seals barking from our front stoop. Best place to grow up!

–Como Park Zoo & Conservatory Visitor





... connecting through **animal care**

After losing his twin brother Buzz, Como Zoo's polar bear Neil has been enjoying an unexpected new chapter. Partnered up with two new polar bears—Kulu, a boisterous juvenile male, and Nan, a 28-year-old female bossy enough to match Neil's 1,000 pound brawn—the three new roommates have been delighting visitors all year as they dive, wrestle, and rest together in Polar Bear Odyssey. Though Neil is now the oldest male polar bear in North America, keeper Kristin Nelson says you'd never know it. **"Neil actually seems like a much younger bear than he used to, like he's gotten some years back,"** she says. **"He's so much more lively now."**

Creating the conditions that keep animals healthy, curious and thriving is a major part of the mission at Como Friends. The nonprofit's support helped to launch Como's successful operant conditioning animal training

program two decades ago, and provides for everyday animal care needs like the new blood pressure and vitals monitors that help keepers provide exceptional care to more than 200 species.

While the year at Como Zoo saw some heartbreaking losses, including the passing of 31-year-old CC the sea lion and 46-year-old Amanda the orangutan, it also marked some major animal care successes, including a full surgical recovery for Skeeter the giraffe, and successful cataract surgery for Gomez the spider monkey. Through your contributions to Como Friends, you're helping to support the whole circle of life, from providing a steady supply of sweet potatoes for Como's three hungry polar bears, to extending Como's long-standing animal care partnership with the University of Minnesota's College of Veterinary Medicine.



"Zoos teach visitors to value the natural world by encouraging us to empathize and connect with animals on a personal level, and I can't think of another animal at Como Zoo who did that better than Amanda. Few of us will ever get a chance to see an orangutan in the wild, but so many Como visitors have come to care deeply about orangutan survival because of their connection with Amanda. She will be greatly missed."

—Jackie Sticha, Como Friends President

.... connecting through **plant care**

Humans have a habit of overlooking the plant life around them—a phenomenon that scientists sometimes call “plant blindness.” But for visitors to the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory’s gorgeous gardens and growing collections of orchids, ferns, bonsai and bromeliads, that’s never a problem.

“Plants are the building blocks of life on earth, and we’re trying to build awareness of that by helping visitors focus on how integral they are to our lives,” says Dr. Lisa Philander, the Conservatory’s new horticultural curator. **“These immersive moments with tiny plants and towering palm trees sort of take you out of your everyday life, and help you start noticing how important and how healing plants can be.”**

Your support for Como Friends helps to fuel that mission by funding five seasonal flower shows in the Sunken Garden, Minnesota’s most beautiful room, providing meticulous care for the Charlotte Partridge Ordway Japanese Garden, and supplying tools and training opportunities that allow Como’s talented team of horticulturists to grow and maintain some of the most beautiful public display gardens in the state. Private contributions also helped to provide for practical improvements in 2022, from reglazing thousands of panes of greenhouse glass in Como’s 30,000-square-foot growing range, to providing a new portable water tank to help keep Como’s exterior gardens looking fresh from spring to fall.



“The Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is a gardener’s paradise, and your latest flower show in the Sunken Garden is truly spectacular. You have outdone yourselves, as usual!”
—Como Park Zoo & Conservatory Visitor

“I can’t wait to see the next flower show. Como’s wonderful designers and crew are greatly appreciated and always do a fabulous job...and this year we need it more than ever. You create my happy place!!”
—Como Park Zoo & Conservatory Visitor



statements of **financial position**

As of December 31,	2022	2021
ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Cash	\$ 1,612,393	\$ 3,963,176
Certificates of Deposit Short-term	1,225,295	—
Bequests Receivable	14,000	14,000
Contributions Receivable	27,278	300,400
Inventory	361,610	233,000
Prepaid Expenses and Other	35,239	50,522
Total Current Assets	3,275,815	4,561,098
OTHER		
Certificates of Deposit Long-term	2,145,162	—
Contributions Receivable, Net of Current Portion	50,565	247,843
Property and Equipment, Net	175,593	101,634
Beneficial Interests in Assets Held by Others	10,200,250	11,020,416
Total Other Assets	12,571,570	11,369,893
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 15,847,385	\$ 15,930,991
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Accounts Payable	\$ 192,091	\$ 190,271
Accrued Expenses and Other Liabilities	88,162	74,021
Total Current Liabilities	280,253	264,292
NET ASSETS		
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions		
Board Designated Reserve and Project Funds	1,864,300	1,631,719
Board Designated Endowment	142,632	164,382
Undesignated	3,098,210	1,824,140
Total Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	5,105,142	3,620,241
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions		
Perpetual in Nature	7,937,160	7,317,780
Purpose Restrictions	2,050,914	4,061,112
Time-Restricted for Future Periods	473,916	667,566
Total Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	10,461,990	12,046,458
Total Net Assets	15,567,132	15,666,699
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$ 15,847,385	\$ 15,930,991

statements of **activities**



thank you 2022 donors!

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

Beloved Daisy | November 13, 1999 – March 9, 2023

\$200,000 +

Anonymous
Manitou Fund
Estate of Penny Rohleder
Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation

\$100,000 - \$199,999

Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc.
Woodland Park Zoological Society

\$50,000 - \$99,999

E.M. Pearson Foundation
Endowment Fund of Como Friends
Ecolab Foundation
Estate of Elfrieda Hintze
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SPIRE Credit Union
Xcel Energy

\$15,000 - \$49,999

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Charlotte Partridge Ordway
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\$10,000 - \$14,999

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\$2,500 - \$4,999

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\$1,000 - \$2,499
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