



ROGER
WILLIAMS
PARK ZOO

News Release

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Roger Williams Park Zoo Achieves Major Landmark in \$35 Million Master Plan

Multi-year Africa Exhibit Renovation Completed Three more major projects coming

Providence, RI – As of today, the phrase “up close and personal” takes on new meaning for guests at Roger Williams Park Zoo. The Zoo celebrated achievement of the first major landmark of its \$35 million Master Plan, the completion of a significantly redesigned Africa exhibit to enhance the quality of life for resident animals as well as the quality of zoo guests’ experiences.

Improvements have been implemented over the past several years including the addition of African wild dogs and wildebeest to the African collection, construction of a new viewing deck that brings visitors closer to both the elephants and the giraffes; expansion of the outdoor elephant habitat to more than double its previous size; construction of a larger elephant pool specially designed for full submersion; the addition of mud and sand wallows; and expansion of the elephants’ indoor sand room (the first of its kind in the country). The interpretive graphics for the entire exhibit emphasize the delicate interconnection of animals, land and people that forms “The Fabric of Africa” to give zoo guests a foundation for deeper appreciation of their entire zoo visit.

John Palumbo, Chairman of the Rhode Island Zoological Society, informed guests gathered for the occasion, including Mayor David Cicilline and Denise Carpenter, Director of Middle Level Education for the Providence School Department, that the renewed Africa exhibit stands as “a testament to our commitment to provide the best care we can for the animals in our collection, educate zoo guests about issues involving animal and habitat conservation, and inspire them to help care for the Earth’s natural resources.”

With support provided by The Champlin Foundations, the Robert F. Stoico FIRSTFED/Charitable Foundation, Textron, and bond monies approved by Rhode Island voters in 2004 and 2006, “The Fabric of Africa” is the first major project completed in the zoo’s \$35 million master plan that was announced by zoo officials in September of 2006.

Mayor Cicilline, an honorary co-chair of the Zoo's capital campaign, noted, "This zoo is one of our city's – and our state's - greatest treasures, a regional attraction that we all can be proud of. With an average of more than a half million visitors per year, the zoo contributes an estimated \$13 million annually to the state economy. These world class improvements will allow Roger Williams Park Zoo to retain its position as one of Rhode Island's top tourist attractions and remain a key driver in our tourism economy."

When the Zoo's Africa exhibits were built 15-20 years ago, they earned the Zoo national acclaim and attracted record numbers of visitors. Today, animal care standards and visitor expectations have risen and older exhibits are reaching the end of their lives. Palumbo added, "The completion of this exhibit is the first big milestone in the plan to lift the zoo to new heights of visitorship and excellence."

Zoo Director Jack Mulvena pointed out that a number of the species in the Zoo's collection including elephants and wild dogs are threatened or endangered, and for this reason the Zoo is involved in a number of education and conservation programs. "We passionately believe in the important role zoos play at this time when there are unprecedented threats to habitats and species locally and worldwide." Roger Williams Park Zoo was recognized recently for its commitment to contribute \$35,000 over five years to a collaborative effort supporting the Tarangire Elephant Project in Tanzania, and is contributing \$50,000 over five years to the National Elephant Center being developed by the national Association of Zoos & Aquariums in Florida. In addition the Zoo contributes \$5,000 annually to the International Elephant Foundation to support its worldwide efforts to protect elephants in the wild.

Speaking on behalf of the Providence School Department, Denise Carpenter acclaimed the Zoo as "an important educational resource, a living classroom where parents and teachers bring their children to have fun and to connect with the natural world."

Mulvena described the three projects remaining in the Master Plan pipeline. The first two will be constructed simultaneously with openings for both anticipated by the end of 2010. A new veterinary hospital will provide a facility that is better designed to meet animal needs and will include state of the art medical equipment. Design work for the hospital will begin this fall and construction likely will begin in late spring. A new Children's Zoo will feature animals native to New England to provide year-round excitement, age-appropriate interactive exhibits and an accessible tree house. The final Master Plan project will be a new North American Trail featuring a return of the polar bears in an exhibit eight times larger than the old one. Some preliminary work on North America has been completed and will continue in this area in the fall; the timeframe for completion of the exhibit will be determined after funds have been raised.

To make all these plans a reality, the Zoo must reach its \$35 million fundraising goal. The Zoo's Capital Campaign, led by Cate Roberts, Textron's Director of Community Affairs, have already raised

over \$25 million through corporate and individual donations. Lead gifts to date include \$3,000,000 from The Champlin Foundations, \$750,000 from The Robert F. Stoico FIRSTFED/Charitable Foundation, and \$500,000 each from Textron, Hasbro, CVS Caremark Charitable Trust and Alan Shawn Feinstein. The Providence Journal Foundation, the Rhode Island Zoological Society Board of Trustees, and other private donors have also made leadership commitments to date. In addition, the Rhode Island community supported the campaign with passage of a 2004 bond issue for \$4 million, and a 2006 bond issue for \$11 million.

Roger Williams Park Zoo is supported and managed by the Rhode Island Zoological Society and is owned by the City of Providence.

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