**Brookfield Zoo’s Hamill Family Play Zoo**

**Celebrating 15 Years of Connecting Children with Wildlife and Nature**

In 2016, Brookfield Zoo is celebrating the 15th anniversary of its Hamill Family Play Zoo, an innovative exhibit that has made an impact on millions of guests who have visited since it opened in June 2001. On the 15th of each month, staff at Hamill Family Play Zoo will host activities from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Guests can meet a zoo professional, participate in a scavenger hunt or craft activities, learn something new about their favorite animals during special Zoo Chats, and join in a parade.

**Remaining 2016 celebration dates and the zoo professionals that will be featured include**:

* Friday, April 15—education and zoo writers AND plush animal clinic
* Sunday, May 15—education and zoo director
* Wednesday, June 15—BIG celebration featuring live music, plush animal clinic, variety of zoo professionals
* Friday, July 15—animal care specialists and veterinary staff
* Monday, August 15—animal behavioral enrichment item fabricators
* Thursday, September 15—groundskeeper and chef
* Saturday, October 15—education
* Tuesday, November 15—volunteers
* Thursday, December 15—librarian and photographer

**Attendance**

Since Hamill Family Play Zoo opened in June 2001, approximately 4.5 million guests have visited the exhibit.

**Hands-on Experiences at Hamill Family Play Zoo**

**Nature Swap**

The Nature Swap, which resembles a children’s bedroom, is filled with hundreds of treasures, from small rocks and seashells to antlers and shark jaws. Through the program, youngsters ages 5 and older bring in items they have found while exploring the outdoors or even bring in journal entries, photos or drawings and trade them for items found in the Nature Swap’s collection. Trading is based on points earned through an official swap session with one of the play partners. Since opening in 2001, Nature Swap highlights include:

* There have been more than 23,000 swaps.
* 6,000 children participate in the Nature Swap program.
* The largest swap to date was a rose quartz that a swapper received 90,000 points for.
* The very first swapper who registered when the exhibit opened in June, 2001 is now 23 years old.

**Greenhouse**

The Greenhouse gives children and their families the opportunity to plant seeds, make cuttings, design planters, and help maintain the exhibit’s plants. Since opening in 2001, greenhouse highlights include:

* More than 70 plants species are on display.
* More than 2,500 tree saplings donated by the Forest Preserves of Cook County have been given away to families during the zoo’s annual Party for the Planet celebration.
* Six banana plants have produced bananas, which have been cut down, and with guests’ assistance, were given to the gorillas in Tropic World: Africa.
* There have been 30 fall harvest parades. Over the years, families have assisted zoo staff in harvesting vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers that have been delivered to animals throughout the park.

**Animal Encounters**

* Over the past 15 years, animal care staff have presented about 14,000 Zoo Chats, which amount to 200,475 minutes of chats.
* Currently, there are 347 animals in Hamill Family Play Zoo, representing 47 different species (not all on exhibit at one time).
* Of the animals at Hamill Family Play Zoo, 13 percent are mammals, 3 percent are birds, 13 percent are reptiles, 5 percent are amphibians, 5 percent are fish, and 61 percent are insects.

**Animal Needs**

* In 15 years, the animals at Hamill Family Play Zoo have consumed approximately 2,145 pounds of fruit, nearly 3,000 pounds of vegetables, 9,750 pounds of meat, 3,000 pounds of lettuce, 23,400 pounds of hay, and nearly 350 pounds of bugs such as crickets and mealworms.
* Approximately 360 bags of cat litter have been used, which amounts to 14,400 pounds.
* About 2,340 bags of shavings have been used, that is about 16,380 cubic feet—enough to cover 3.5 football fields from end zone to end zone in a 1-inch layer of shavings.
* The fish tanks in the exhibit have been cleaned 1,612 times.

**Activities**

* Face Painting--since the opening, visiting children, and even many adults, have used more than 35,000 crayons to create a variety of animal faces on themselves.
* There have been 630 ladybug releases resulting in around 2,835,000 ladybugs taking flight.
* Approximately 1,785 stories have been told by Play Zoo staff.
* Children have created more than 7,500 feet or about a mile and a half of mural artwork to decorate the zoo. (This does not include artwork they have taken home!)
* More than 225 gallons of glue has been used for art projects.
* More than 450 gallons of washable tempera paint has been used by children to create works of art.
* Children have wrapped more than 121,752 feet of ace bandages on plush animals in the exhibit’s Animal Hospital.
* More than 90,000 toilet paper tubes have been used for art projects—that’s more than 68 miles of tubes.
* Children have made more than 18,700 bird feeders.

**Awards and Recognition for Hamill Family Play Zoo**

* 2002—Best Exhibit Award from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums
* 2009--#2 of Best Zoos for Kids by *Parent Magazine*
* 2011—Best Hands-on Exhibit for Animal Lovers from *Chicago Magazine*
* 2011—National Wildlife Federation Backyard Wildlife Habitat Certification
* 2011—Education Award for Significant Achievement for NatureStart: Early Childhood Nature Program from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums
* 2013—Champion of Change from the White House for reaching young children and their families
* 2013-2016—La Grange Area Department of Special Education Vocational Alliance Partnership Appreciation Award for Good Works program, which provides a job site for special education students to learn vocational skills
* 2012-2015—Nature Explore Certified Classroom from the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation. (Brookfield Zoo was the first certified Nature Explore Classroom in a zoo setting.)
* 2014-2015—National Inclusion Project partnership to implement a training program titled *Let’s All Play* that enables Zoo Camp staff at Brookfield Zoo to better serve children with disabilities

**Staff and Volunteers**

* Volunteers have given over 75,000 hours in service at the Hamill Family Play Zoo.
* Currently there are 68 early childhood docents who volunteer at Hamill Family Play Zoo; 12 of those have been volunteering since the exhibit opened in 2001. In addition, there are staff that used to visit Hamill Family Play Zoo as guests when they were younger and because of their experiences at the exhibit have gone on to pursue careers associated with education and/or conservation.

**Programs**

* In 2010, CZS launched a comprehensive early childhood initiative called **NatureStart** based on groundbreaking educational practices first developed at the Hamill Family Play Zoo. **NatureStart** includes informal programming, scheduled classes, workshops, professional development training, internship opportunities, and college courses. This award-winning program was designed to engage, educate, and inspire parents; caregivers; educators in museums, zoos, aquariums, and nature centers—along with landscape developers and municipalities—to help them develop the skills to replicate nature play experiences for children from birth to age 8. Since the launch of **NatureStart**, over 500 formal and informal educators have completed **NatureStart Professional Development**, taking what has been learned at Hamill Family Play Zoo into organizations throughout the world.
* A year after the exhibit opened, staff began the **Good Works** program, which allows high school students with developmental disabilities to volunteer at Hamill Family Play Zoo and acquire skills that will serve them as adults. Since it began in 2002, nearly 100 students have participated in the program, some have gone on to work in paid positions at Brookfield Zoo and in the local community.
* The **Bridges** program is a collaboration between the zoo and Community Support Services that began in the fall of 2006. The Bridges program helps adults with developmental challenges develop job and customer service skills as well as independence by placing them in a four month volunteer position at the zoo. The majority of participants volunteer at the Hamill Family Play Zoo where they are trained to help in a variety of different ways, including craft preparation, refreshing play settings, and organizing donated recyclables.