



GREATER PHILADELPHIA AREA DOCENT CONSORTIUM

GPADC Fall Meeting Philadelphia Zoo 20 September 2023

Welcome:

Monica Gondek GPADC Chair, introduced GPADC past chair and Philadelphia Zoo docent, Janet Krevenas. Janet organized this meeting. She has been a docent at the Zoo for 24 years. Before introducing Kristen Waldron, Chief of Staff of the Philadelphia Zoo, Janet shared background about her. Kristen works closely with the Zoo's leadership team and board of directors to drive strategic planning, implement organizational priorities, and measure mission impact. Kristen has been in the Zoo field for 25 years. Janet became associated with her when she led the education/conservation department.

Kristen Waldron, Chief of Staff of the Philadelphia Zoo. For anyone who hasn't been to the Zoo in a while Kristen gave a perspective about where the Zoo came from and where it is today. Philadelphia is America's first Zoo, it opened to the public on July 1, 1874.

There are several firsts at the Zoo:

- successfully caring for chimpanzees, orangutans, cheetahs, and giant river otters;
- the first in the world to build an onsite animal care center and hospital in 1997;
- the first to develop a special formulated diet called Zoo cake;
- in 1938, the first to open a children's zoo in the Western Hemisphere.
- In 2011 a new experience was opened called Zoo 360. Animal welfare came first when this system was implemented. It allows animals to travel freely.

In 2011 Treetop Trails was connected to the rare animal conservation center that moves animals through that space. The rare animal conservation center was then connected with the Peco Primate Reserve. Primates that live in one area of the zoo can travel all the way down to another area of the zoo and vice versa. The idea was expanded and Big Cat Crossing was opened.

Kristen came up with idea of Meerkat Maze. There's a trail for the Meerkats and a kid trail. A concept called parallel play encourages children to mimic the behavior of the animals to build empathy. 70 zoos worldwide have replicated this idea.

Kristen stated that the zoo's vision is that they are caretakers of the world in which people and animals thrive together. She started a special diet for the kingfisher which saved them from extinction in the 1980's. Her efforts in Brazil helped to save the golden lion Tamarin. Through collaborative efforts she was able to save bats in Australia. Local conservation work in the community called Bulbs not Bullets in Mantua, was created to have a space for beautification in the neighborhood. Signature projects in the education area are the West Philadelphia Scholars program. Tenth grade student that live in the neighborhood spend 4 years doing work in the community on local conservation and community outreach. Students are recruited from the Parkside, Mantua, Fairmount, and the Brewerytown area. Before concluding, she asked us to make sure we see the latest exhibits at the zoo. Particularly, the sloth bear cubs, the Puma cubs and Lemur Island.

Our next speaker was Barbara Bernard, current docent Chair at the Zoo. She has been a docent at the zoo for 14 years.

Barbara told us that docents are ambassadors to the animals, and curiosity of the animals is encouraged. There are 83 docents employed at the zoo and they meet once a month either via Zoom or in-person. She spoke about the conservation programs at the zoo, and how it wouldn't be possible without the docent involvement. She stated

that the animals are representatives of their relatives in the wild. She spoke about how docents can tell people about how difficult things can be in the wild and what small or big things people can do to make a difference. The conservation efforts at the zoo are very important, and Barbara is glad to be a part of it. She answered a few questions about training, request for personal tours, refresher courses, training for security and conservation, and changes the zoo has made after Covid. She shared that the zoo hosts community nights 3 or 4 times a year. Members and their families are invited. There were free haircuts and school supplies provided recently.

Janet Krevanes briefly spoke about an endowment fund that was left for the docents to use for educational purposes. She was involved in the large dinosaur exhibit and highlighting the flight of the Monarch butterfly to Mexico and life cycle of the Monarch butterfly. Janet enlarged that project to include pollinators. When the large dinosaur exhibit moves on, the project supporting pollinators will move to the pollinator garden near the rare animal house. Janet encouraged us to look into supporting native plants in our own yards. She asked us to look up Doug Tallamy who is an entomologist from the University of Delaware to understand the importance of pollinators and how we can support them in our yards.

Monica thanked the speakers and asked the Steering Committee members to stand. She announced that the GPADC Winter Meeting will be held at Woodmere on January 16, 2024. In case the weather is bad it will be via Zoom. Crossroads will be held at Glencairn Museum, the date is April 16th or 17th. Five members of each institution will be able to attend and lunch will be provided. Volunteers are needed for the Crossroads Committee. Elections will be held for Steering Committee positions at Crossroads. Our treasurer would like to train someone now to take over the treasurer position in June 2024. Monica asked if anyone is interested in the treasurer position, the Steering Committee, or Volunteering for the Crossroads committee to get in touch with her. A sign-up sheet and membership forms for any institution that wanted to pay their GPADC dues was provided.

There was a short break, the discussion for about 40 minutes. Afterwards Monica called on a representative from each table to come up and give a brief summary of what they talked about Round table discussion and Responses:

How has your institution adapted new technologies to update or enhance programs and exhibits?

Smartphone applications are being used to connect and communicate, QR codes are being used in some institutions, online, phone audio and touch-screen tours. Headsets are utilized during in-person tours, and hands on interactive exhibits.

How has that changed what we do as docents?

School participation programs have expanded, institutions are more welcoming shifting narratives that are more inclusive, community input is encouraged, interactive in-person tours. Technology hasn't changed what docents do. Docents are very important and needed to greet people, answer questions, direct people to the technology, most of all providing human interaction.

In conclusion, the weather was excellent, and the tours given by the Zoo docents were fun, engaging, and informative. The outcome was a very successful program at the Philadelphia Zoo.

Respectfully,

Velma Jackson
GPADC Recording Secretary