



50 Years of Friends of the Zoo

Behind every great zoo, there's often a Friends of the Zoo!

Many of the 240 zoos and aquariums accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) wouldn't be where they are without the support of non-profit "Friends" organizations devoted to helping them succeed. Here in Syracuse, the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo has been around since May 1970 – which makes us 50 years old this year!

Just as your zoo has changed a lot in 50 years, so has the Friends. We have gone from a small group of citizens that formed to save a failing zoo to a key partner of the zoo that supports its AZA missions of top-notch animal care, nature education and saving species. Here's a decade-by-decade snapshot of 50 years of Friends:

1970

When the Friends formed, the Burnet Park Zoo was a 56-year-old facility housing a small menagerie and the Friends a handful of volunteers trying to improve it. They held fundraisers, built a membership of 700 and eventually convinced the city to turn the zoo over to Onondaga County. By 1979, the zoo was in such disrepair that the county and the Friends had two choices: shut it down or completely rebuild. They chose the latter.

2000

The Friends took on the role of county partner in operating the zoo under a dual governance model; **Chuck Doyle was named Zoo Director and Janet Agostini was hired as Executive Director of Friends.** **Penguin Coast opened with a colony of 19 birds in 2005** and four chicks hatched the following year! **Primate Park opened in 2010**, providing an outdoor playground for siamangs and other primates.

1980

The county committed \$10 million for a total renovation of the zoo, and the Friends raised another \$2.5 million. The project closed the zoo for over 3 years. Many of the animals went to other homes. Asian elephant Siri, the project's poster child, moved to the Buffalo Zoo with a plan to return when it was completed. **The "New Zoo" opened in 1986** with bigger and more natural habitats and a strong conservation focus. In 1987, the zoo achieved accreditation by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and has maintained it ever since.

2010

In 2011, Chuck Doyle retired and Ted Fox took over as Director of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. The same year, the zoo opened the Helga Beck Asian Elephant Preserve, including the 12,000-square-foot barn with green roof and a 4.5-acre outdoor habitat. In 2016, the zoo opened the 50,000-gallon elephant pool, a \$1.8 million project fully funded by the Friends. In 2013, **Friends supporters Laura and Rick Iorio donated the Giant Pacific Octopus exhibit.** In the last two years, the Friends and county worked together on such enhancements as the expansion of the Helga Beck Asian Elephant Preserve and exhibits for new, rare animals such as Justus the kiwi and Naga the Komodo dragon.

1990

The Friends forged a working relationship with Onondaga County and a leadership role in capital campaigns to continuously improve the zoo. **The Friends launched campaigns to help fund a tiger exhibit, penguin exhibit, rainforest exhibit, the USS Antiquities exhibit and an education wing.** The USS Antiquities cave opened in 1998 and the Amur tiger exhibit in 1999. That same year, **the Burnet Park Zoo received a \$2 million endowment from the Rosamond Gifford Foundation** and was renamed the Rosamond Gifford Zoo at Burnet Park.

2020

In January, former Friends President Janet Agostini retired and the Friends board welcomed Quentin "Skip" Lockwood as interim executive director (See Skip's letter on page 2). **The Friends' latest capital project, the Zalie & Bob Linn Amur Leopard Woodland, is slated to open this summer.** Despite recent challenges, support for our mission remains strong and we look forward to the next 50 years of supporting Central New York's premiere wildlife conservation center!