



Visitor Services for
Cultural Attractions

Wild Connections

Your connection to insights about Service Systems Associates and K-M Concessions

April 2010

Meet Eric Stephens, Miami Metrozoo Director

How does an Illinois State alumnus end up as Director of the 327-acre Miami Metrozoo? It's straightforward . . . complete an internship with the Miami-Dade Park and Recreation Department. That's what Eric Stephens did over 30 years ago when he jumped on the opportunity to leave snowy central Illinois for the sunny beaches of Miami for a five-month internship. He hasn't looked back.

That decision not only netted him a career, but also a wife. About one year after Eric completed his internship and was working for the Park and Rec Department, a new employee from Western Illinois State University started with Miami-Dade County. Eric and Sandy met, dated, married and had two children. Sandy also works for the Park and Rec Department as chief of the maintenance division. And no he doesn't receive special treatment!

In 1980, Eric transferred to the zoo to take a job in the finance department. It was an exciting time as the county-operated zoo was relocating to a new site on Richmond Naval Air



While Eric is pictured with giraffes here, his favorite animal is the rhino.

Station property. Initially, the zoo opened July 4, 1980 with 12 exhibits covering 35 acres.

Eric was later promoted to business manager and was named zoo director in 1998. As director, Eric and his staff opened several exhibits, including *Dr. Wilde's World*, an indoor facility, *American Bankers Family Aviary*, *Wings of Asia* and *Samburu Station*, a giraffe feeding encounter.

Eric shared that the greatest accomplishment of his career was the opening of the \$50 million, 27-acre *Amazon and Beyond* in December 2008. This exhibit is the largest one that showcases tropical America flora and fauna in the United States and possibly the world. The exhibit is the size of an average zoo and features 120 additional species, including keystone animals like the anaconda, giant river otter, jaguar and harpy eagle. Eric said *Amazon and Beyond* was a great thing to work on, and it

Spotlight on Miami MetroZoo Director Eric Stephens

Wife: Sandy

Two children: Ben and Emily, who will soon graduate from high school and attend University of Central Florida in Orlando, where her big brother is a junior.



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Words of Wisdom



Kevin McNicholas

Burgers burnt; vent hood not working; smoke filled room; dishwasher broken; hot dogs cold; very busy; a few employees are no shows:

When our profession creates some unexpected inconveniences, console yourself that no profession is without them, and that all of the perplexities of business are softness compared with the vacancy of idleness.

(Paraphrased from a Samuel Johnson quote.)

Miami MetroZoo director, continued from page 1

significantly expanded the Zoo's collection as well as it added new conservation, research and educational opportunities. "The impact of this exhibit has positioned the Zoo as a bigger player in the community," he added, "It also increased repeat business, which enables us to communicate our conservation message and grow our number of supporters."

Eric added that the community now recognizes the zoo as a safe and fun family destination. The "staycation" phenomenon has been beneficial. "We have families starting to support us, and we've taken this support and turned them into our friends," he added.

"Service Systems Association staff also has helped us. We consider

Miami Metrozoo to change name

The Board of Miami-Dade County Commissioners approved a resolution that formally renames Miami MetroZoo to "Miami-Dade Zoological Park and Gardens."

The working name, or day-to-day name, will be "Zoo Miami" for marketing and recognition purposes. The zoo will celebrate its 30th anniversary on July 4 and the re-naming of the zoo will be part of the anniversary celebration.

them as members of our staff," said Eric. "They are part of the zoo; we are both pulling in the same direction and working for the same goals, such as making sure everyone has a wonderful experience. It's those experiences that contribute to our success." Eric concluded that they will keep doing what they are doing and keep doing it well so that everyone will continue to benefit.

SSA's partnerships go international

Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort (AWPR), located in the United Arab Emirates, recently selected SSA to advise and consult on their concession and retail departments.

Tasks include providing input on visitor service facility design, providing operating procedures, advising on employee recruiting and training, creating menus and developing a retail buying plan. Also, SSA will provide a master-plan analysis for future food and beverage and retail facility designs.

Tom Kaferle, Director of Zoo and Wildlife Operations for AWPR, explains the decision, "We wanted a strong partner with a lot of industry experience and knowledge that can help us develop our program within a short timeframe. With the resources that the SSA team has, it's a

perfect fit. They'll help us develop our current operations as well as help with our future operations in making sure we have the right mix when the Park opens in 2011."

First established as Al Ain Zoo in 1968 by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the wildlife park is currently home to 4,300 animals, 30% of which are considered to be endangered. When the current location closes in 2011, it will become a "behind the scenes" facility for conservation and research, while the Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort will open its gates and welcome guests.

Doc Collins is SSA's "On-Site Designated Representative" for AWPR and SSA Executive Vice President David Goetz will represent SSA from a corporate level.



Why SSA is going local!

K-M Concessions and SSA units are going local in their culinary operations and are telling the story about how and why. Four Company ECO Influencers share some success stories.

Sean McNicholas, Executive Vice President Sales

Going local is one of the biggest ways one can be responsible to the environment. Buying local produce supports the local community, significantly reduces the carbon footprint of shipping, and promotes wellness. If you go local and organic, you get the best of everything. One of my favorite catering events done by the company was at a local garden, in which all of the vegetable hors d'oeuvres were hand-picked from the garden. Imagine accompanying the great burger you just ordered was lettuce and tomato, grown locally on site at the Zoo.

Travis Kight, Corporate Executive Chef

The way we eat has an enormous impact on the health of the planet. By choosing to eat lower on the food chain and focusing on local and organic produce, we can help curb global warming and air pollution, avoid toxic pesticides, support local farmers and enjoy fresh, tasty food. Going local, once a small trend among a few chefs is rapidly becoming a full-blown movement. For example, the Chef's Collaborative, a culinary organization that promotes sustainably produced local, seasonal and artisan foods, now boasts 1,000 members, mostly chefs. That's up sharply from the 22 members it had when it was founded in 1993.

Nick Rado, Regional Vice President

We need to "tell the story" of why we chose local through appropriate signage. The importance of signage comes down to handful of key points. First, through signage we promote awareness of our ECO efforts, engagement in our efforts and education of how people can make a difference. Second, signage in all of our venues gives our sustainable mission and efforts continuity, a branded message. Finally, we (K-M, SSA and our Clients) should be proud of these efforts. Too many times our efforts go unnoticed, and there is no better way to tell the world than through a signage package promoting our desire to be "Champions of Sustainability."

Andrew Fischer, Monterey Bay Aquarium Retail GM

It is extremely beneficial for guests to know that the food they are enjoying is from a local farm. Guests who understand that their food is being prepared with local ingredients will see and taste the difference. They, themselves, may be influenced to start a garden or buy from a local vendor versus buying that shipped-in fruits or vegetables. A good example is the **Dallas Zoo's** Homemade Pecan Pie Tarts. The Zoo has many pecan trees on property, and the SSA culinary team noted that the nuts were going to waste. Stan Mills found a terrific recipe for pecan pie, and the team now offers these treats at the POS. "Date Shakes" are also the most popular dessert item at the **Living Desert**, in Palm Desert. These delicious ice cream shakes are prepared with dates grown on-site!



Wild Couture concept store at the Los Angeles Zoo is a Haute Hit



The storefront of the new Wild Couture Store attracts attention of shoppers at the Los Angeles Zoo.

Service Systems Associates is a high fashion house. . . well not quite . . . but almost. In March, a fun new concept shop called *Wild Couture*, which carries fashion forward merchandise that is still zoo-related or themed for moms, teenagers and little girls, opened.

Apparel items focus on modern designed garments with today's trendy fashion prints and designs. They are also carrying more accessories, such as fashionable hats and belts.

The store design makes girls want to come in a "hang out" with a zebra print sofa, chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, along with hip music playing in the background.

Brad Smithling, Executive Vice President of Retail for SSA, said "We wanted to create a fun, trendy, environment that you wouldn't quite see in any other zoo across the country. We wanted a shop that represents Los Angeles and the guests that come to the zoo. I'm very proud of our Buyer Denise DeMont's efforts in creating an exciting assortment of merchandise that pleasantly surprises our guests when they come in this new shop."

What is the FMLA and who qualifies?

Need time off to take care of sick relative? Just had a baby? You're seriously sick? Do you need FMLA time? Director of HR Scott Schroeder answers your questions about the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

In 1993, President Clinton signed the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows eligible employees to take up to **12 weeks of unpaid leave** for childbirth, adoption, foster care, to care for a child, parent or spouse with a serious medical condition or if the employee has a serious medical condition.

There are guidelines for who is eligible for FMLA benefits. An eligible employee is one who works for a "covered" employer and has worked for 12 months or more. This includes anyone working at least 1,250 hours during the preceding 12 months. That employee is also required to work in the United States or in any territory of the United States.

Take the FLMA quiz and see if you know the answers.

1. Who is eligible to receive FMLA?

- A. Hourly Employees only
- B. Salary Employees only
- C. Both Hourly and Salary Employees
- D. Any Employee with sick pets

2. How long must you have worked for SSA and how many hours must you have worked to qualify for FMLA?

- A. 12 months and 1,250 hours
- B. 18 months and 1,250 hours
- C. 6 months and 1,000 hours
- D. You just have to fill out an application

What's happening in the field . . .

Fort Wayne Children's Zoo's Cheri Crowley had double knee replacement surgery in February of 2010 and is already walking around without a cane! She says she feels great! We are happy to have her back without pain!

The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo is closed to the public from mid-October until mid-April, however, SSA staff opened the gift shop about three weeks in December to assist and support the zoo's initiatives to sell memberships as holiday gifts.

Utah's Hogle Zoo not only offered its annual *Breakfast with the Bunny* with a hot buffet-style breakfast served at two different times; SSA culinary staff also served *Lunch with the Bunny* where guests could have their picture taken with the Easter Bunny, complete a fun craft project and enjoy a make your own sandwich lunch served with homemade potato salad, cookies and drinks.

Each month the Monterey Bay Aquarium host a Borgsteadt's Day, the event is celebrated by different departments. Mr. Borgsteadt has been associated with MBA since before it was built 25 years ago. Being a product of the Packard



Monterey Bay Aquarium Office Supervisor Julie Lacy interacts with Mr. Borgsteadt during the annual Green Borgsteadt's Day.

way of conducting business, he felt that every now and then, all departments should stop working and get together for snacks or coffee to meet with each other to catch up. It's a great way to connect all employees including senior management and front-line staff. SSA requested five years ago to be included in this monthly event. We were given March as our month, and since our involvement started back in 2005, we have called it our *Green Borgsteadt's Day* celebrating St. Patrick's Day.

The SSA Culinary Department at the Albuquerque BioPark recently pro-

vided the catering and craft services for three days for the dramatic TV show, *In Plain Sight*. They also catered a Valentines Day Brunch at the Aqua as well as a five-course plated meal for an international group, which was hosted by the President of the BioPark Society.

Albuquerque BioPark Culinary Department also created new menus at both the zoo and aquarium. They created a \$3 menu at the zoo that is getting a great response. Also, a Panini sandwich are being offered at a Panini station; a favorite features peanut butter, jelly and banana Panini.



Tampa's MOSI SSA staff report that temporary DaVinci shop, offering museum quality gifts as well as adding food and drink service has proved to increase the length of a guest's stay as well as provided an additional value for guests.

Congratulations!


At The Living Desert Annual Gala, Founder and President Emeritus **Karen Sausman** received the eighth *Annual Tracks in the Sand Conservation Award* in recognition for her 40 years of service to the organization. Karen was President and CEO when the facility opening in 1970.



The Colorado Restaurant Association presented its *Reaching for the Stars Knoebel Award* to **Kevin McNicholas**, President, K-M/SSA. The award honors an individual or organization for their outstanding contributions to furthering workforce and education initiatives of the foodservice and hospitality industry. He also recently received the Colorado Good Neighbor of the Year from the Good Neighbor Law organization.

Connections



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Employee profile

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To read, go to
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In order for our guests to fully enjoy the zoo experience, all food locations should have an easy to understand allergy and ingredient list that can be made available to guests with special dietary needs.

Ashley Sage,
Utah's Hogle Zoo
Culinary Manager

Take care of your employees, and they will take care of you (and your guests)!

Christine Jamison,
Fort Wayne Children's Zoo
GM

News from our partners



A female endangered Sumatran tiger cub was recently born at the Sacramento Zoo. It was the second litter for Bahagia and Castro at the zoo.

The **Detroit Zoo** set an attendance record on an April day, with 15,658 visitors, beating the previous high of 14,409 set on July 3 of last year, zoo officials said. On the next day, 15,477 people visited.

A new 7,000-foot special exhibition. *Hot Pink Flamingos: Stories of Hope in a Changing Sea*, recently opened at the **Monterey Bay Aquarium**. By visiting the six galleries, guests will learn about the many ways that cli-



Hot Pink Flamingos: Stories of Hope in a Changing Seas is the new special exhibit at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

mate change is affecting ocean animals as well as tales of hope involving people and communities tackling climate change and making a difference. Gallery exhibit animals include tropical wading birds, green sea turtles, coral reef creatures, jellies and Magellanic penguins.

The **Cheyenne Mountain Zoo's** giraffe herd has two new members. The two were sired by the zoo's bull giraffe, Mawimbi, but have different mothers. The zoo claims one of the largest captive giraffe herds in the world with 20, including the newborns.

Rare Peninsular pronghorn twins were recently born at the **Los Angeles Zoo**. The pair was pulled for hand rearing. The zoo is the only institution in the U.S. to breed this rare species. Native to Baja California Sur, Mexico, these graceful animals



Endangered Peninsular pronghorn twins were born at the Los Angeles Zoo.

are mostly active at dawn and dusk.

Tampa's Museum of Science and Industry, or MOSI, recently opened its newest addition to *The Amazing You* exhibit. Three million visitors have watched, played with and pondered the human body from its embryonic state through adolescence since phase one opened two years ago. Phase two completes the life cycle post-puberty and offers a glimpse into middle and old age through use of robots, interactive quizzes and hands-on activities.



In just six months, the mongoose colony has nearly tripled in size at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo. Six pups were born in November and seven more in March, this take the total to 20 mongooses!