



From snow to sand, Zoo Miami General Manager Chris Hepp likes it all

At Zoo Miami, one of the popular attractions is J.J. the silverback gorilla, and this animal is General Manager Chris Hepp's favorite zoo animal. Like the silverback, Chris has adapted to his surroundings.

Chris grew up in Buffalo, New York. While there he loved the north, the snow and winters. When he was 18, he made the decision to go to school out of state. "I just packed up my stuff and left to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach where my main goal was to become a commercial pilot," he said. Chris graduated with a bachelor's degree in management from the aviation-oriented university. He also earned a private pilot license. Chris returned home, but went back to Florida when he couldn't find a job in the Buffalo area.

Now, Chris said, he's all about water, beach and sand. He especially likes the Florida Keys with its priceless natural resources and the therapy they provide

the mind, body and soul. Chris likes watching the sun set over the water and feeling that ocean breeze. He claims it's relaxing.

Chris is getting married to Carolyn on September 11, 2010 (9/11/10), but he quickly adds that he and his fiancée are not superstitious. The choice of date

friendly. Carolyn grew up in the Dominican Republic, a destination that Chris looks forward to visiting with the love of his life as she knows all the good places to visit.

Another love of his life is his dog, Scrapy. Chris calls him a little pound dog as well as his "little son." He shared that when he took

"I want to be remembered as an honest person, who cares for other people. I'm a lover of life. Every day is a blessing to me. I believe in living life to the fullest."

was selected because it was the only date available at the church in Buffalo. And no, they are not honeymooning at nearby Niagara Falls, which has been nicknamed the "Honeymoon Capital of the World." For generations, honeymoon couples have been drawn to the beautiful, dramatic, thundering Niagara Falls, but for Chris and Carolyn a romantic Caribbean cruise drew their interest. He met Carolyn on a blind date arranged by an ex-girlfriend with whom he remained

Scrapy to Buffalo in the winter, his dog looked at him as if he was crazy.

Chris is a volunteer with Best Buddies, a non-profit organization that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He said that three Best Buddies are on the payroll at Zoo Miami. "It takes more patience to work with these individuals, but seeing satis-

faction of having a job and doing it well, is worth the time.” Chris added that these employees also motivate other employees to step up their performance.

In his free time, Chris likes to watch the drama TV show, *24 Hours*, or the comedy TV show, *The Office*. When listening to music, Chris likes rock and roll, jazz and R&B, pretty much everything except for country and polka genres. He shared that his grandmother would be disappointed that he didn’t list polka music as a favorite!

Also, he enjoys cooking, especially smoking things on the grill. When asked what his favorite food is, Chris said he should say Buffalo wings as that’s where he’s from. But he prefers meat and potatoes. “I love red meat!” he said.

Chris is passionate about football, especially the Buffalo Bills, the only team ever to play in four consecutive Super Bowl games. He also grew up playing football. It shouldn’t be a surprise that Chris participates in the incredibly popular phenomenon of Fantasy Football. He said he enjoys playing the fantasy sports game since it makes watching

football more interesting because participants earn “fantasy points” by using the statistics of real football players. With this love of football, it’s no surprise that Chris named *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN The Magazine* as his favorite magazines.

Chris used to work for a company that handles food service in sports stadiums, entertainment venues, national parks, resort hotels and airports. One job had Chris working at the stadium for his beloved football team, the Buffalo Bills. Another saw him feeding the players during spring training for the San Diego Padres. Chris received General Manager of the Year

from this company. One of the best jobs that Chris has had was a Manager at the Miami Metrozoo for the company that previously held the concessions contract for the facility. Six years later, he returned to the zoo and settled back into the same office when he became the GM for SSA. He has been with the company since January 2009.

When Chris was 12 or 13, he delivered papers. Three years later, he started his food and beverage career as a dishwasher in a local restaurant. Today Chris said he gets excited every morning when he gets to work. “It’s a great atmosphere,” he added.



Chris and his fiancée Carolyn are getting married on September 11, 2010 in Buffalo, New York, and honeymooning in the Caribbean — combining all his loves.