



Visitor Services for
Cultural Attractions

Wild Connections

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

September 2011

Welcome to the Buffalo Museum of Science

The Buffalo Museum of Science selected Service Systems Associates (SSA) as its exclusive retail partner, as well as to manage its guest admissions operations.

“The Museum of Science selected SSA because of their experience, creativity, and efficiency in running retail operations. By outsourcing this function, it will allow the Museum to focus on bringing exciting and relevant science experiences to our local community and tourists,” said Museum President and CEO **Mark Mortenson**.

SSA Senior Vice President and COO **Tim Brantley** said the SSA team plans to assist the Museum in achieving its mission of inspiring curiosity through exploration while generating greater revenue.



“We are extremely pleased with how well our values align with the vision and values of the Museum of Science,” said Brantley, “Our history of driving sales, outstanding store designs and the assurance of a positive retail operation compliments the Museum’s goals,” he added. *Continued on page 2*

Going from “good to great” at the Denver Zoo

At last year’s Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) national conference, a popular topic was how a **good** company can become a **great** company. This concept, which was explained by Jim Collins, the author of the book, *Good to Great Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don’t*, has been interwoven throughout the management practices of not only SSA, but also many of our partners.



In a presentation at the recent AZA conference in Atlanta, **Kyle Burke**, Denver Zoo’s Executive Vice President and COO, shared his opinion on how that zoo is making the leap from good to great.

Kyle identified three questions that need to be answered: *Are we? Can*

we? Should we? He believes these questions correlate to the “hedgehog concept,” which means having a simple, extremely clear concept of what the zoo’s business is. That business is conservation. Kyle explained it’s something that the zoo team is passionate about and wants to be the best at in the areas of zoo exhibits, conservation projects, employee programs and on-grounds programs, such as the gasification project.

Another premise of the book is to have the right people on the bus, moving the wrong people off the bus and placing the right people in the right seats. Kyle said he believes that zoo already has most of the right people in the right seats on the bus and is “driving” toward a culture of “we can and we should” rather than “they can and they should.”



Words of Wisdom



Kevin McNicholas

Remember the wonderful song *Tomorrow* from the Broadway Musical *Annie*? The last line is: "it's only a day away." Sometimes though, tomorrow isn't that great. For example:

- They were going to be all that they wanted to be...tomorrow
- Nobody would be braver, or kinder than they...tomorrow
- A friend is troubled and weary and needs a lift, they would call and see what they could do...tomorrow
- Each morning they stacked up the letters they'd write...tomorrow
- There is a mountain of things they need to get done...tomorrow

Yes, it is only a day away...but what are you waiting for!?!?

The Living Desert SSA staff cooks up new look

To better meet the needs of guests visiting **The Living Desert**, the decision was made to remodel the outdated Meerkat Café; it's now the Coyote Café.

In addition to the name change, the restaurant received a fresh new look inside and out.

The renovations started in early August when counters, cabinets and even walls were demolished.



Crews quickly demolished the Meerkat Café.

After several weeks of hard work, the space now features a décor that has a warm, rich patina that complements the setting of 1,200 acres of desert wilderness.

When possible, the construction crew used eco-friendly materials.

The earth-tone colors along with wood-grain accents offers a warm



The renovation of Coyote Café implemented a southwestern color scheme, as a result the space feels very warm and welcoming.

and welcoming atmosphere to guests. Other visual touches include decorative lighting and refinished floors. In addition to the décor changes, the restaurant also revamped its menu.

The Coyote Café now features a gourmet "grab-and-go" concept. Southwest cuisine was created in response to the guests' growing demand for high quality authentic ethnic menu offerings. The staff has taken Southwestern fare to a new level with a large variety of traditional menu favorites, such as tacos, burritos, chimichangas, fajitas, tostados, taco salads, nachos, and more.

Buffalo Museum of Science partnership, continued

Mortenson said that their expectation is that SSA will leverage their experience to grow and improve the profitability of their retail operations.

SSA plans to invest in the Museum's gift shop in order to create a new retail experience for guests. Brantley also noted that a key operating strategy will showcase the company's commitment to sustainable, eco-friendly solutions in every aspect of its operations.

The Museum also hosts special travelling exhibits, events, 3D films and public and community programs. The Museum's permanent exhibits and galleries highlight the Museum's extensive collections of over 700,000 specimens and artifacts.

The Museum also opened the popular **Explorations** gallery in 2010, its hands-on interactive exhibit area designed for early childhood explorers.



The Dallas SSA staff sings the bottled water blues



Bottled water is in many ways an American obsession, with Americans drinking annually 8.6 billion gallons.

The **SSA team** at the **Dallas Zoo** decided to make a change because in reality, bottled water is just water, and they were spending more than \$7,000 on bottled water during a four-month period.

In May, SSA culinary staff was provided reusable bottles that were donated, and mugs were purchased for other staff members. Large water coolers were also purchased for use at the employee water stations. These purchases totaled \$225.

Through one-to-one communications and signage, the team promoted the switch from plastic water bottles to reusable ones.

By phasing out plastic bottles, the team saved \$6,500. Other savings included 21,000 water bottles and 28,000 cups kept out of the trash. This is equivalent to 1,000 pounds of plastic that was eliminated from the waste stream!



Members of the SSA team at the Dallas Zoo made the switch and eliminated their use of bottled water – a cost savings of more than \$7,000 in a four-month period!

The project was coordinated by **Allen Van Brocklin**, Food Service Supervisor, and **Dan Bevis**, Dallas Zoo Executive Chef.

Dan said the project was an eye-opener. “I didn’t realize how much of an impact such a simple change could make!” he added.

It’s getting greener at the San Francisco Zoo

It’s all about a communication at the **San Francisco Zoo**.

The SSA team created displays in its Lemur Cafe promoting what food was locally sourced so that guests became aware of the commitment to be green.

The team has also started its own internal “green” meetings. The team meets once a month and has drawn the interest of zoo staff members who also want to attend. The agenda for the meetings is simple, each team members needs to bring one idea to discuss and possibly implement.

Currently, these include how to recycling food waste scraps,



Educational signage at the San Francisco Zoo explains how the Lemur Café staff tries to be green. The sign on the right talks about local sourcing and identifies where staff buy its seafood, coffee, milk, beer, produce, chicken, beef, bread, wine and tortillas.

getting employees to communicate green efforts to guests and the client and revamping the birthday party program to make it green, yet profitable.

What's happening in the field . . .

SSA Zoo Boise employed three university students from Pyatagorsk, Russia this summer. **Nickolay Karaov**, **Alesya Malysheva** and **Anna Konovalova** received J-1 Work and Travel Visas that enabled them to work for the summer and spend some time afterwards traveling to learn more about the United States. Nick is a fifth year psychology major, Anna is a fourth year psychology major and Alesya just completed her degree in graphic arts. They are students at the Pyatagorsk State Linguistic University. Nick and Alesya have both been in the United States before, and this was Anna's first immersion into American culture.

If you were to ask any Zoo Boise staff member about the experience, they would tell you that it was extremely positive and that we all learned a great deal from each other.

While most people do well to hold down one job, **Johnathan Hillman** has two. About six years ago, Johnathan was working part-time at the Cincinnati Zoo as a dishwasher, but decided he wanted a full-time job. Through Great Oaks follow along program, he found a full-time job at an area restaurant. However, when the zoo staff



heard they were going to lose him, they worked around his schedule at the restaurant to keep him on. Now Johnathan works six days a week and loves it! He is very popular with staff and employees, and his bosses praise him for his work ethic and punctuality. Retail Manager **Lisa Sparks** said John is a wonderful team member who always has a warm hello and great smile each day he comes to work. His story was recently featured in an article in Hamilton County's newspaper.

Annual Chef's Summit & Competition

On October 8th, SSA hosted an exciting three day Culinary Summit at the Albuquerque Bio Park. The event was orchestrated by SSA's National Corporate Chef, Travis Kight with the support of General Manager Annie Fedora, Regional Vice President (& former chef) Nick Rado, with integral help from Ron Hall in Denver, and Chef Ryan from Detroit. The owners and executives of SSA joined more than 20 executive chefs representing accounts from across the country, gathered to focus on all matters "Food." The meeting included discus-



You never know what may happen on a sunny Sunday at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden . . . Marisa, a retail team member, and Damon, the Food and Beverage Operations Manager, demonstrated to guests how the slingshot flying monkey flies through the air. The laughs attracted General Manager Steve Wells, who had to see how far he could shoot the monkey.



Zoo Boise and A Taste of the Wild Catering hosted the Boise City Employee Picnic on September 7. Over 870 staff and family members enjoyed the zoo and a Classic American Picnic!

sions of trends, sustainability in dining, standards, and procurement as well as various trainings on the latest products and production techniques. Chef Travis also introduced the new "Culinary Handbook," a guideline to assist in our quest to change what Cultural Attraction Food can be!

The highlight of the event was the actual Culinary Competition. The competition included four teams, all challenged to produce a four course meal from a mystery basket full of goods, many of which were grown at the Albuquerque Bio Park's on-site farm! Judges included officials from our Bio Park partnership, board members, and various City dignitaries. Look for more on this fantastic event, including who won the competition, in our next Newsletter update!



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Employee Profile

Tom Kelly
San Francisco Zoo
General Manager

To read, go to
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News from our partners

The **Los Angeles Zoo** announced three significant animal births. Three Sumatran tiger cubs are being raised in an off-exhibit area by their mother. These cats are highly endangered. Staff are raising two giant otter pups. These South American animals are extremely rare in zoos and are exhibited in only five U.S. zoos. Also, 21 Komodo dragons hatched. Fewer than 10 zoos in North America have successfully bred Komodos. This marks the zoo's second successful Komodo hatching.



The Los Angeles Zoo welcomed the birth of two giant otter pups, which are being hand-raised by animal care staff.

At the **Sacramento Zoo**, the otter habitat was recently renovated.

The new habitat now features a rock backdrop and a larger land area with new landscaping surrounding the pool. Guests can now view the habitat through giant glass windows. This was one of the original exhibits at the zoo.



The **Albuquerque BioPark Botanic Garden** recently opened the first dragonfly sanctuary pond in the



Afternoon visitors to the Albuquerque BioPark Zoo recently had the surprise opportunity to witness the birth of a giraffe. The newborn calf was on its feet and walking within half an hour. Giraffes are native to the savanna of Africa. A newborn calf can weigh between 120-150 pounds at birth and stand six feet tall.

United States. The new exhibit features an aquatic habitat perfect for attracting and breeding dragonflies and damselflies. Plants for perching grow around the pond. A stream bubbles into the exhibit from a rocky desert landscape. The Pond is the first public part of the **BioPark's BUGarium**, a multi-faceted exhibit that will give guests a fly's eye view into the world of insects.

The **Houston Zoo** has received a Savigny's tree frog from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Officials discovered the frog during a routine check of a shipping container being delivered to the Port of Houston. The frog was captured and offered to the Houston Zoo, which will be the only zoo in the United States to house this species.

An Arabian Oryx female calf was recently born at **The Living Desert**. These oryx are considered extinct. They only be seen in zoos and other animal conservation programs. The Living Desert now houses four oryx females, two males, plus one newborn calf!

