



### **Zoo Edition Archives -Spring/Summer 2008**

#### **Excerpts from an interview with Melissa Wheeler, WPZ Drafting and Design Specialist**

**WPZ:** Your position title is Drafting and Design Specialist. What exactly does that mean?

**MW:** : It is hard to put my job into a single capsule. The drafting part of my job is what you would expect, putting ideas down on paper in order to visualize a project. Sometimes these are very specific like for construction blue prints and other times they are more illustrative. As a designer I help organize all of the ideas gathered from multiple people and put all of these ideas in a form that everyone can visualize and understand. I am so privileged to work with such an amazing group of people. There are many different departments involved in designing projects: facilities, animal management, exhibits, education, the list goes on.

**WPZ:** What did you study in school to get this job?

**MW:** : I have a professional degree in landscape architecture, bachelors in art and a minor in botany.

**WPZ:** What has been your involvement with designing the flamingo exhibit?

**MW:** I am on the work team. We have been meeting weekly, working on the design concept and checking in on the progress. The work group has people from different departments and there are lots of questions and problem solving at our meetings.

**WPZ:** Did you have to know anything special about flamingos? How did you get that information?

**MW:** As a designer I have a responsibility to know my client. In this case my client happens to be a group of flamingos and their keepers. Luckily I am not alone on the design committee and I can ask a lot of questions and get answers from the collection staff and curators. If they don't have the answers, they have the resources to find them.

**WPZ:** Any other projects you're working on?

**MW:** : (with a laugh) Of course! The most exciting one right now would probably be the DeBrazza's [a monkey that lives in African tropical rain forests] outdoor holding area. This is going to be a place for the monkeys to spend time outside without being on view to the public. Exhibits are definitely the magical part of my job, but many of the projects I work on are behind the scenes. I'm especially interested in working with the Animal Health Department to design areas that will make their job easier.

**WPZ:** Any advice for students who would like a job like yours?

**MW:** Volunteer. It's the best way to get an idea of what is actually going on as well as figuring out if you really like it. You get to meet people and ask lots of questions. There is no straight path, but if you focus on an interest you're going to learn a lot of other stuff on the way.

**WPZ:** The hardest question, what is your favorite animal?

**MW:** : Oh goodness, I don't think I could. You're asking this of a woman who has 10 fish tanks, 7 tarantulas, 2 cats, and 1 big dog. I guess if I had to say... it would be whatever animal I'm working with at the time; pink, fluffy or 18 feet tall.