



Zoo Edition Archives - Spring/Summer 2006

Excerpts from an interview with Katherine Steen, WPZ Public Programs Supervisor

WPZ: What is your job title and what duties does that involve?

KS: I am the public programs supervisor. Public programs are free programs that are available for all zoo visitors of all ages. They include the raptor flight program, Bugs on Wheels and Reptiles on Wheels, and keeper talks, among others. I supervise the staff and volunteers that present these programs, and help to create new programs. Right now most of my time is devoted to creating programs for Zoomazium.

WPZ: How did you get this job?

KS: When I was 13, I was in Girl Scouts and I participated in a program called Wider Opportunities, through which I took a class called Wildlife Careers for Women. It was a two-week program at the Bronx Zoo that gave me the opportunity to work at a variety of zoo jobs, including zookeeping and education. At the end of the two weeks I knew I either wanted to be a zookeeper or a zoo educator. After I graduated from high school, I went to Cornell University and got my degree in Animal Science. In addition to my degree, I also got a lot of experience teaching. Experience is so important — anyone can get a degree, but you really need the experience with people.

WPZ: What are you doing to plan for Zoomazium?

KS: Right now I am collecting resources to see what we can use in programs — and it's a lot! We will have quite a few animals that will be housed in Zoomazium that we will be able to include in programs. We also have a great collection of biofacts, which are natural objects from animals, such as bones, fur, and feathers. It's good to include them in programs since it is often the only opportunity visitors have to touch some of our animals. But the most important resources are the people that are involved now, and will be involved in the future. It's been exciting to work with the design team to help to create the space, to decide what will be in the building, and what it will look like. I've been working with the Education Department staff to see where their interests and skills are, and to help them develop programs. I have also been recruiting a new group of volunteers to present the programs.

WPZ: What do you think is the most exciting thing about Zoomazium?

KS: : It's so new. We are the first zoo to put all of these elements together in one place, providing an unparalleled nature play space for young children. Other zoos have play spaces where children can explore nature, but we are the first to include technology. Because of that we will be able to keep the building fresh and interesting for children (and their parents), even if they visit regularly.

For example, there will be places where we will use computers and video to put pictures of animals in particular places. Because those pictures are not printed on paper and displayed on some kind of permanent fixture, they can be changed frequently. So if you come in one day and there is a squirrel nest in a tree, the next time there could be a whole family of squirrels, or an owl with eggs, or something entirely different. We have created, in essence, two mini-versions of the zoo; one for children from birth to age three, and the other for children aged four to eight, and we've involved children in the planning of it all.

WPZ: What advice do you have for students that might want a job like yours?

KS: Get the experience! Volunteer! It's a great job - I get to work with animals and with people — that's the best part. Come and visit the zoo with your family! Check out Zoomazium! It will be cool!