

PRESS RELEASE

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Three Northwest zoos and aquariums honored with national award for empathy for animals program

SEATTLE—Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Seattle Aquarium, and Woodland Park Zoo were honored with a significant achievement award from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) for their collaborative “Fostering Empathy for Animals” project. AZA’s 2018 Education Award was presented last week at AZA’s annual conference in Seattle.

The AZA Education Award recognizes outstanding achievement in educational program design, judging programs on their ability to promote conservation knowledge, attitudes and behavior, show innovation and measure success.

“AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums are gateways through which millions of visitors learn about and value the natural world,” said AZA President and CEO Dan Ashe. “By sharing their knowledge and passion for wildlife through the Fostering Empathy for Animals project, educators at Seattle Aquarium, Woodland Park Zoo, and Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium are inspiring the next generation of conservationists.”

In 2015, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo came together to broaden collective understanding of empathy and the role that zoos and aquariums can play in fostering empathy toward animals and nature. Over the last three years under the leadership of project manager Kathryn Owen Consulting, the three AZA-accredited organizations leveraged the facilities’ individual and collective strengths to advance the knowledge, application and measurement of empathy. An empathic observational framework was developed that outlines indicators and expressions of empathy and is now being used by a number of zoos and aquariums across the country.

The AZA Education Award reflects the shared work that resulted from this partnership, including a research-based approach to understanding the construct of empathy and its applications to the zoological and aquarium field, implementation of empathy-based programming for visitors, and evaluation of empathy as a learning outcome including a suite of easy-to-use evaluation tools. Further, this collective work has helped amplify the field’s discussion of empathy and its role in achieving the mission to save wildlife and inspire others to make conservation a priority in their lives. Woodland Park Zoo continues to advance learnings at the intersection of research and implementation with grants to its ambassador animal program, animal welfare and perception, and other programs. They will continue to grow the network of zoos and aquariums engaged in empathy-based efforts, and work together to broaden the field’s understanding of empathy and expand its collective impact.

“Within the current social climate is a national conversation about empathy and compassion, particularly about developing those traits in young people. This collaborative partnership has inspired us and other organizations to ask ‘what if zoos and aquariums made an even greater, more intentional contribution to engendering empathy within our communities?’ This defines a new role for our organizations, one that matches our extraordinary strengths with a growing societal need,” said Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Alejandro Grajal, PhD.



SEATTLE AQUARIUM



“Encouraging and developing empathy for animals in children is an important motivator toward action on the animals’ behalf. Seeing animals receiving exceptional care and learning about the importance of a healthy habitat help children transfer their resulting feelings of goodwill to animals in the wild, including less charismatic animals,” said Robert Davidson, Seattle Aquarium President and CEO. “Working cooperatively with our partners has allowed us to reach a broad audience in our regional community at different touch points in their understanding and commitment to conservation.”

“We are extremely grateful to the Association of Zoos & Aquariums for this award, and we are thankful for our partners—Woodland Park Zoo and Seattle Aquarium—in this collaborative achievement,” said Alan Varsik, director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma. “But what makes us most proud isn’t the winning of this honor. It is the work we’ve all done that will benefit our communities for generations to come.”

About Woodland Park Zoo

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and certified by the rigorous American Humane Conservation program. The Humane Certified™ seal of approval is another important validation of the zoo’s long-standing tradition of meeting the highest standards in animal welfare. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats through more than 30 field projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Each year, the zoo engages more than a million visitors of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and walks of life in extraordinary experiences with animals, inspiring them to make conservation a priority in their lives and a difference in our planet’s future ecological health and sustainability. Visit www.zoo.org and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources. A member of the Metro Parks Tacoma family, the zoo creates a legacy of sustainability for future generations through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities; it also embodies Metro Parks’ mission of creating healthy opportunities to play, learn and grow. The zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA). The Zoo Society, a 501(c)(3) organization, is an instrumental partner in the conservation, animal-welfare and education initiatives.

About Seattle Aquarium

The Seattle Aquarium is one of Washington state’s leading environmental education and stewardship institutions, and the region’s gathering place for discussion and sharing information about marine conservation. It maintains a number of research initiatives in cooperation with federal, state, zoological and university partners. The Aquarium is located on Pier 59, at 1483 Alaskan Way. Visit SeattleAquarium.org, and follow the Aquarium on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

About AZA

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and seven other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit www.aza.org.

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