

# Palm Beach Daily News

PalmBeachDailyNews.com

Established 1897

THE SHINY SHEET®



SUNDAY, NOV. 9, 2003

48 Pages 75 cents

## ZOO AWAKENING



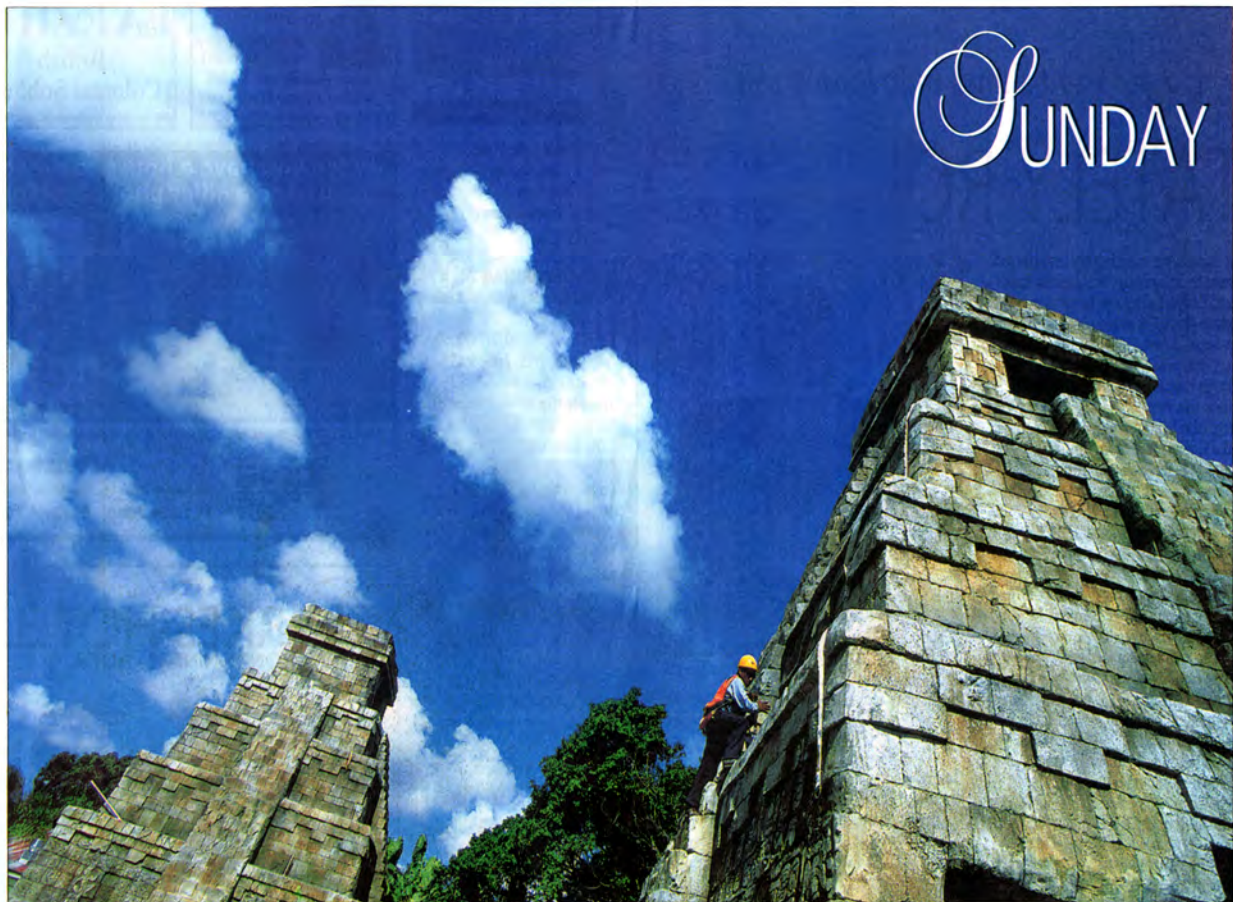
Daily News Photos by Jacek Gancarz

### *Park expansion to bring out the wild*

The misty bamboo-lined path to Tiger Falls, above, was the first new area of the Palm Beach Zoo at Dreher Park to be developed. Piped-in jungle noises and thick fog create a tropical atmosphere. It's part of the zoo's multimillion-dollar project that puts animals in lush cageless settings designed with the look, sounds and feel of a themed animal park. An anteater at play, right, will be part of Tropics of the Americas, along with capybaras, llamas, white-fronted capuchin monkeys, Baird's tapirs, golden conures and more. Phase I of the project — nine new exhibits — should open in March.



Photos, Stories, B1.



SUNDAY



**Above:** A worker scales one of two 45-foot Mayan pyramids. One pyramid will house two South American bush dogs and the second a pair of Jaguars. **Left:** The Bengal tiger has a 17-foot waterfall and enough space to give the big cat a bit of privacy when he wants it.

# ZOO ROARS OVER EXPANSION



A replica of an ancient Mexican observatory will be the home for bats as well as insects, spiders and salamanders.



Tropics Cafe, a restaurant with the laid-back feel of Key West, overlooks Lake Baker.

Dreher Park project, thanks to philanthropy of PBers and others, aims to be world-class facility.

In the 1950s, West Palm Beach Parks Director Paul A. Dreher started a patchwork zoo — with a couple of chickens, ducks, a goose and a goat — on 1½ acres of land in what was then Bacon Park.

In five decades, what became the Palm Beach Zoo at Dreher Park has grown and developed, expanding to 23 acres and adding animals of a more exotic nature, from monkeys and bears to snakes and flamingos.

But, until the last few years, the zoo maintained the feeling of a no-frills community zoo.

The sight of cracked concrete pathways and animals displayed behind chain-link fences or in steel cages perpetuated that image.

That image is passé. The zoo is morphing into a modern facility that puts animals in lush, cageless settings designed with the look, sounds and feel of a themed animal park.

Call it the Palm Beach Zoo re-do.

Piped-in jungle noises and thick fog create a tropical atmosphere along the bamboo-lined path to Tiger Falls. Completed in 2000, the home of Townee the Bengal tiger has a 17-foot waterfall and enough space to give the big cat a bit of privacy when he wants it.

To the east, the Florida Pioneer Trail is a walk back in time. Completed in 2001, the exhibit is centered around an Old Florida cracker shack. Living amid the cypress trees and swampy water around the shack are animals indigenous to the Sunshine State, including a Florida panther, bald

Plans, Page B6

Please see ZOO, Page B6

Natalie Perman of Cambridge, England, skips by the zoo's new \$1.8 million fountain plaza, which opened in March. Music plays, and, at night, lights flash as the 325-jet fountain shoots water up to 40 feet. The 3-year-old, who toured the zoo with her mom and grandmother, was visiting her grandmother in Palm Beach Gardens.



## THE SCOOP

The Palm Beach Zoo at Dreher Park is on Summit Boulevard east of Interstate 95 between Southern and Forest Hill Boulevards. It is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, except for Thanksgiving. Admission is \$7.50, adults; \$6, seniors; \$5, ages 3-12; and free for ages 2 and younger.

Admission may increase to \$9 once Tropics of the Americas

opens in March.

Zoo memberships allow unlimited admission for a year and provide discounts to other zoos and the gift shop, invitations to Palm Beach Zoo events and other benefits.

Memberships are \$50 for an individual, \$45 for seniors, \$75 for a family or grandparents and \$1,000 for corporate memberships.



Some 300 creatures native to Central and South America, including anteaters, will be part of the Tropics of the Americas exhibit.

Story by David Rogers  
Photos by Jacek Gancarz

FUTURE OUTLOOK



# Small zoo puts 'big ideas into place'

From Page B1

eagles, alligators, flamingos, raccoons and river otters. Phase II, a home for whitetail deer, snakes, black bears and other animals, is set to open next summer.

With moms and dads watching, children splash around the zoo's new \$1.8 million fountain plaza. Opened in March, the 325-jet fountain shoots water up to 40 feet to the beat of music and flash of colored lights. The fountain plaza is the new entrance to the zoo.

To the north, Tropics Cafe, a restaurant with the laid-back feel of Key West, serves meals with a view of Baker Lake and tropical birds. A marketplace retail shop is under construction in the area.

### 'Heart of zoo' in March

These new attractions signal a new direction for the Palm Beach Zoo, but they are only a taste of what's to come.

Just beyond the fountain, workers with PCL Construction are building Phase I of the new heart of the zoo: Tropics of the Americas.

Here — in and around two 45-foot Mayan pyramids, a massive lined-concrete tree trunk, a cave, a highland plain and islands — will live some 300 creatures native to Central and South America, including giant anteaters, capybaras, llamas, white-fronted capuchin monkeys, Baird's tapirs, golden conures and more.

**Torre/Design Consortium** of New Orleans, working with local engineering firm Kimley-Horn & Associates, designed the tropical exhibit with fun and education in mind. The Mayan plaza under construction will include an archeological dig site for kids, an ancient-style observatory and the pyramids. One pyramid will house a pair of jaguars, the other will be home to two bush dogs. The replica of an ancient Mexican observatory will be the home for bats, as well as insects, spiders and salamanders.

### More creatures to arrive

Animals for Tropics of the Americas began arriving by



As part of the Tropics of the Americas, two tribes of monkeys will call Primate Islands home. It will include a Primate Cave through which visitors will pass, viewing stalagmites and fish and Cave Beetle exhibits.

air and land from zoos across the country two months ago. By the end of winter, an Ark's-worth of creatures will make the Summit Boulevard facility home. Each is examined under quarantine and then put in temporary quarters, General Curator Keith Lovett said.

The zoo expects to open Phase I of Tropics of the Americas in March.

The zoo's interim executive director, Garrett Hambuechen, is enthusiastic about the zoo's transformation. "We are seriously going prime time," Hambuechen said. "There is no question in my mind this exhibit will put this zoo on the map countrywide."

The zoo's board of directors finalized the zoo's redevelopment plan about five years ago. It envisioned a first-class facility with wide appeal, but was "painfully vigilant" to ensure the zoo's growth would be guided by its mission of animal conservation and public awareness, said board president Jorge Rodriguez-Lugo.

"That has been the crux of the difficulty of implementing the dream. While you want to do a state-of-the-art zoo, we want to stay away from being an amusement park," said Rodriguez-Lugo, a senior vice president at the Palm Beach office of Lehman Brothers. Palm Beacher Kane Baker,

vice president of the zoo board, agrees. "The old zoo had its charm, not withstanding the smallness of it and the cracked concrete walk paths," Baker said.

"We don't want to create a metro zoo where you have to take transport to get to parts of it. We want to maintain a family zoo feeling, but we are moving into a world-class zoo and world-class learning environment."

The zoo now displays animals in surroundings that mimic their natural habitat, Lovett said. "The new exhibits put animals in context of geography and culture of people indigenous to that area," he said.

### Philanthropy

Gifts from the late George and Harriet Cornell of Delray Beach funded the bulk of the \$20 million first phase; anonymous gifts from Palm Beach residents make up about \$5 million of that amount, Hambuechen said. That philanthropy from islanders is not surprising. Seventeen of 25 Palm Beach Zoo board members live in Palm Beach, Hambuechen said.

Rodriguez-Lugo said former Palm Beach residents Rolla and Kim Campbell, stepfather and mother of Kane Baker, helped inspire the zoo's renaissance.

This season, the zoo will initiate a campaign for an

operations endowment fund.

The \$10 million Phase II of Tropics of the Americas will feature a walkthrough aviary with a waterway and suspension bridge 24 feet above ground — to give a close-up look at tropical birds at tree-top level.

Phase II also will feature a 10,828-square-foot Discovery Center/River Village complex.

Inside the River Village will be aquatic exhibits of river, lake and ocean animals that could include sharks, reef fish, arapaima, a gigantic South American fish, crabs and turtles. A construction date has not been set for Phase II.

The development of Tropics of the Americas — along with Tiger Falls, the Florida Pioneer Trail and the interactive fountain — is bringing a new aura to the zoo, Hambuechen said.

"When I used to work here many years ago, people would come in and go 'oh.' People from New York, they'd be disappointed. They'd say, *this is our zoo?*" Hambuechen said.

The zoo founded with barnyard animals has come a long way.

"It was a small zoo with little money and big ideas," Rodriguez-Lugo said. "It's been transformed into a small zoo with enough money to put big ideas into place."

— drogers@pbdailynews.com