



## **The Manatee and Aquatic Center**

**In the Mason M. and Charles P. Lykes Florida Wildlife Center at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo**

### **Mission**

The Manatee and Aquatic Center expands the traditional boundaries of a zoo, focusing efforts on a high-profile Florida marine mammal species. Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo works in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and its Florida Wildlife Research Institute to rescue, rehabilitate and release Florida's endangered manatees. The primary objectives are:

- ◆ To operate a facility providing critical care for injured, sick and orphaned wild manatees
- ◆ To provide significant research facilities to allow scientists on staff and in the university community to study manatees; and
- ◆ To educate more than 1.1 million visitors annually about the endangered status of manatees, the importance of aquatic and marine habitat preservation, and the steps necessary to conserve the population.

### **History**

In January 1991, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo opened the Manatee and Aquatic Center as part of the Mason M. and Charles P. Lykes Florida Wildlife Center, with the generous support of the Pepsi Bottling Group. The state-of-the-art center is comprised of a public exhibit building with two underwater viewing pools, three treatment pools, an emergency hospital and public viewing boardwalk.

In November 2000, the hospital area was named The David A. Straz, Jr. Manatee Hospital in honor of the Tampa philanthropist whose major gift allowed the Zoo to open manatee treatment facilities to the public for the first time by way of an extension of the Florida boardwalk.

In 2001, the Zoo constructed a manatee amphitheater adjacent to the underwater viewing pools, just off the boardwalk. The TECO Energy Manatee Amphitheater, made possible by a gift of \$250,000 from TECO Energy, accommodates at least 100 visitors for daily educational talks.

As of February 2009, the Zoo's David A. Straz, Jr. Manatee Hospital has treated 216 manatees with 112 patients re-introduced into Florida waters and 13 current patients. Approximately 85 percent of those animals surviving the first 48 hours are candidates to be considered for release back into the wild.

**Facilities**

The Zoo's Manatee and Aquatic Center was the first to be designed and built specifically for manatees. It is one of three critical care facilities in the state of Florida and the only non-profit hospital in the world specifically dedicated to the treatment of sick, injured and orphaned manatees. The facilities consist of:

- ◆ Two exhibit pools containing 200,000 gallons of water, underwater viewing, educational graphics, audio messages and visual aids;
- ◆ Three 16,500-gallon treatment pools with remote controlled floors for medical procedures;
- ◆ A full-service facility equipped for emergency treatment with sterile operating room, large animal x-ray, dark room, and life support systems; and
- ◆ A public viewing area from the Florida boardwalk.

**Commitment**

The Zoo dedicates approximately \$1 million per year to manatee rehabilitation. More than 1.1 million visitors annually are educated on the plight of the manatee, the importance of aquatic and marine habitat conservation and steps the public can take to promote manatee conservation. In addition:

- ◆ The Zoo's operations commitment to manatee programs comprises up to 50 percent of its annual animal department operating expenses.
- ◆ On average, it costs approximately \$30,000 to treat one manatee for a year.
- ◆ During a 1996 manatee die-off of more than 150 animals in Southwest Florida, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo was the only critical care facility to treat sick manatees from the area, helping to identify the cause of the problem as red tide intoxication.
- ◆ Long-term research into the hearing capabilities of manatees has been conducted at the Zoo.
- ◆ In July 2008, the Zoo reached a record-high manatee patient load of 16 manatees at one time.

**Other Highlights**

In addition to the Manatee and Aquatic Center, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo offers programs to further educate the public about manatee conservation, including:

- ◆ Teacher workshops which have served more than 3,000 educators;
- ◆ Classes for youth and adults about environmental issues concerning manatees;
- ◆ Manatee sleepovers at the Zoo for children and parents;
- ◆ Information tables at conservation events within the Zoo; and
- ◆ Manatee Awareness Day each November at the Zoo.

**Media Contact**

Rachel Nelson  
Director of Public Relations  
Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo  
813-935-8552 ext. 212  
[Rachel.Nelson@lowryparkzoo.com](mailto:Rachel.Nelson@lowryparkzoo.com)