

Lehigh Valley Announces Plans For Children's Activity Area

The \$10 M Project to the Lower Section of the Zoo will Begin this Spring

By Matt Provence

(Schnecksville, Pa.) – Lehigh Valley Zoo has officially announced plans for major renovations to the lower section of the facility. The project, named the Children's Activity Area (CAA), will be completed in four phases with the construction beginning in Spring 2025 and the expected finish in Summer 2027. Highlights of the CAA include an accessible playground, a new barn in the reconfigured Fred & Anne Jaindl Family Barnyard, the Isaacman Family Education Center and a splash pad.

The CAA combines state-of-the-art amenities with good old-fashioned fun. The goal is to increase opportunities for guests to get close to animals and see them in an entirely new way; provide new educational opportunities for schools; and highlight the zoo's conservation work advocating for -- and protecting -- species around the globe. The \$10 M project will be supported by philanthropy, public support and zoo funding. Information about the CAA and how to become a contributor can be found at lvzoo.org/CAA. Currently, the zoo has raised \$2,345,000 of its \$10,000,000 goal.

"This project important to our mission, as additional classroom space will allow for a larger portion of the community to partake in our educational programming and learn about animals and conservation," LV Zoo President & CEO Amanda Shurr said. "It's important for our guests, as the CAA will provide options for a longer visit with more educational and recreational opportunities; and it is important to our staff, as it will provide improved living areas and amenities for our animals."

Once completed, the zoo anticipates an increase in attendance by at least 30,000 guests annually. The increase will aid in improving animal habitats and their well-being, while also amplifying the guest experience. The zoo is coming off a record-setting annual attendance, having welcomed 183,414 guests during its 2023-24 fiscal year.

Phase One, beginning this spring, consists of creating a new accessible playground and a reconfiguration of the Fred & Anne Jaindl Family Barnyard. The new playground will feature modern, accessible equipment for children of all abilities to be active, as one of the best ways for children to learn is through play. With support from David Jaindl and the Jaindl family Foundation, guests will be able to walk through a modern barn -- which will be open year-round -- and see the animal "bedrooms" as well as participate in brushing or feeding those residents that wish to participate. The layout of the barn and barnyard will also have a positive impact on the ability of the zoo's animal care team to support these animals.

Phase Two involves the construction of the Isaacman Family Education Center. The new building, generously supported by Jared and Monica Isaacman, will triple the current capacity for the zoo's education team to host classes, groups and animal encounters. The center will serve as a state-of-the-art home for many of the zoo's ambassador animals while also providing an additional set of guest restrooms, a nursing station and changing rooms for the future splash pad.

"As we started to talk about the current capacity constraints of the zoo, it became very clear that we needed to prioritize a new education center with this project," Chairman of the LV Zoo Board Jeffrey Drobins said. "The current indoor space was built more than 50 years ago and has very minimal capacity. The new Isaacman Family Education Center will have three times the capacity and I couldn't be more excited to work with Jared and Monica to make this piece of our project a reality."

Phases Three and Four include the addition of the splash pad and improvements to other amenities in this section of the zoo, such as a marketplace for food and retail concession and a semi-permanent covered seating area for guests of all ages and abilities. The splash pad will encourage guests to stay and play longer while offering relief during the warmer summer months.

Throughout the construction process, several animals will be temporarily relocated until the project is complete.

The CAA marks LV Zoo's third major construction project in the past three years, as the zoo added Habitat Madagascar -- a new exhibit that houses mongoose lemurs, red ruffed lemurs and tortoises -- on May 26, 2023, and Rothrock Red Panda Peak on June 7, 2024.

LV Zoo is currently operating under winter hours of Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at lvzoo.org. Beginning in March, the zoo is back to opening seven days per week.

