

JASON A. JACOBS

Summary

Passionate and proven zoo professional committed to unsurpassed animal care and visitor satisfaction with over 20 years of experience in Association of Zoo & Aquarium (AZA) institutions demonstrating exceptional success in partnering with staff, trustees, donors, community leaders and government officials in strategic planning, exhibit design, project management, operations, marketing, budgeting, public relations, fundraising, animal management and conservation education.

Employment

Sacramento Zoo (Sacramento, CA)

Executive Director/CEO (January 2018-Present)

Serve as CEO overseeing a \$9 million operating budget and 120+ full-time employees while administering contracts for concessions and veterinary care for Sacramento Zoo, home to over 500 animals and a popular destination for over half a million guests each year.

- Work with the City of Sacramento and community stakeholders to ensure a vibrant, relevant, sustainable, fully AZA-accredited zoo through creation and execution of a long-term strategic plan that addresses the future of the zoo and includes a relocation viability study.
- Build and foster strong and effective collaborations to advance the zoo's mission and develop new sources of support, such as the partnership with UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine for animal health and conservation, which yielded a state-funded Veterinary position for the zoo.
- Engage the community via political polling and surveys to assess long-term wants and needs of the community and their willingness to fund zoo projects.
- Represented the zoo during its March 2018 AZA Accreditation hearing and immediately addressed AZA animal welfare concerns by raising funds for new habitats and/or working with collaborative partners to find homes for over 40 animals including bats, tigers, small mammals and rare birds.
- Completed a short-term campaign via major gifts to enact immediate changes to improve the guest experience (Okapi habitat, Playground, Meerkat habitat, Alligator habitat, temporary Dinosaur exhibit) and/or improve animal welfare (Lion habitat expansion and primate renovation).
- Created a new department, Institutional Advancement & Marketing, realizing a significant increase in donor engagement and philanthropic gifts, including the most successful gala in the history of the zoo.
- Developed new revenue-generating programs such as behind-the-scenes experiences, conservation evenings and the largest membership increase in the history of the zoo (over 11,000 households).

Reid Park Zoo (Tucson, AZ)

Zoo Director (July 2013- December 2017)

Served as Zoo Director overseeing an operating budget of over \$6 million dollars and nearly 100 City and Contracted employees in all facets of zoo operations at Reid Park Zoo, which welcomes 500,000-600,000 visitors per year with over 400 animals, including a breeding herd of African elephants.. Served as the zoo's primary liaison to the City of Tucson, Reid Park Zoological Society Board of Trustees, Pima County and the University of Arizona.

- Co-Chaired a Zoo Task Force composed of City officials, nonprofit and local business leaders to guide the future of the zoo. The task force met for several months with the recommendation to transfer the zoo's management from a municipal model to a private non-profit.
- Worked with the nonprofit Reid Park Zoological Society to pass a 1/10 of 1% sales tax dedicated to the zoo to finance both capital improvements and operations. Over the course of a decade the tax will generate nearly \$110 million dollars for the zoo.
- Prepared documents and physical facilities for the zoo's 2014 AZA Inspection and represented the zoo during its successful hearing accrediting the institution for a five-year cycle.
- Led local stakeholders, political officers, donors, trustees, staff and visitors to update the Master Plan and enhance the physical plant to create new visitor experiences with ancillary revenue sources to increase length of stay and per cap spending.
- Worked with corporate and philanthropic supporters to raise over \$8 million (without public/municipal funding) to finance and build the first five projects of the updated master plan – Wildlife Carousel (2015), Primate Habitat (2016), Meerkat (2017), Alligator (2017) and Animal Health Center (2017)
- Created a formal intra-government agreement with the University of Arizona to pursue an enhanced animal health program, zoo operation support, teaching opportunities and conservation initiatives resulting in the University's funding half the salary of a veterinarian and partial operation of the Animal Health Center.
- Guided the renovation of the elephant habitat in preparation for the first ever elephant birth at the zoo.
- Worked with the development department to increase philanthropic giving opportunities, hosting several new donor prospect and stewardship events – Sundowners, Special Speakers and Tours.
- Led the zoo to its all-time record attendance year in 2014 of over 618,000 visitors.
- Hosted AZA Directors Conference (2016), Bear Care & Welfare Conference (2015), and an annual Elephant Welfare Workshop.

Los Angeles Zoo (Los Angeles, CA)

Director of Development & Marketing (October 2005-July 2013)

Planned and directed all zoo development, marketing, public relations, corporate sponsorships, filming and public events. Served as Zoo Administrator on a rotating basis supervising the zoo's operations in the absence of the Zoo Director on holidays, weekends and special event days. Designed an annual attendance and revenue plan (\$20 million) utilizing existing operations, experiences, cultural and special events to meet the zoo's attendance and revenue goals as well as attract the diverse ethnic demographics of Southern California. Developed all external and internal communications for the zoo while serving as spokesperson and primary media contact. Drafted reports and prepared regular presentations to the Zoo Board Oversight Commission, Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association Board of Trustees (GLAZA) and City of Los Angeles. Served as a member of design team for \$160 million capital projects program. Served as liaison to the Los Angeles Convention and Visitor's Bureau and City Film Task Force

- Initiated and stewarded relationships with partnership brands, social service organizations and cultural venues including Star Wars, Nestle, Fisher-Price, Disney, Berenstain Bears, Sesame Street, Make-a-Wish, Getty Trust, Child & Family Services, California Fish and Game and Aquarium of the Pacific to provide value-added experiences and drive attendance and revenue.
- Developed a marketing, publicity and outreach plan for the 2011/2012 fiscal year centered around the LAIR which resulted in 1,660,450 visitors to the zoo, the highest attendance in over 20 years. The marketing plan was recognized by the AZA.
- Directed the communications efforts on behalf of the zoo's proposed elephant habitat when it came under attack from animal rights groups, celebrities and several city officials.
- Played instrumental role in the Los Angeles Zoo's inclusion as one of 25 kid-friendly zoos in Parent's Magazine.

- Coordinated zoo operations, advertising, promotion and attainment of six-figure sponsorships for the opening of new exhibits and campaigns including White Alligator (2006), Spider City (2007), Campo Gorilla Reserve (2007), Elephants of Asia (2010) and the LAIR-Living Amphibians, Invertebrates & Reptiles (2012).
- Cultivated relationships with local, regional and nationwide media to generate in excess of \$1 million dollars in free publicity for the zoo on an annual basis.
- Served as liaison to Betty White, assisting in the research, writing and promotion of *Betty & Friends: My Life at the Zoo*, a New York Times Best Selling book.
- Consulted on several television shows, documentaries and feature length films.

Potawatomi Zoo (South Bend, IN)

Deputy Director (2004-2005)

Education & Marketing Director (2001-2003)

Served concurrently as Deputy Director of the City-owned Potawatomi Zoo and as the top-official for the non-profit Zoological Society. Potawatomi Zoo is a 23-acre zoo featuring a collection of 400 animals with an annual attendance of 190,000 visitors and operating budget of \$1.6 million dollars. Responsibilities included hiring and training staff in all facets of zoo operations including education, development, marketing, maintenance, membership, animal care, guest services, rides, retail outlets, volunteer services and horticulture. Directed the Conservation Education department, developing curriculum for all age groups. Served on zoo's firearms/first response team for emergencies.

- Represented the zoo in the absence of the Zoo Director during its successful 2004 AZA accreditation hearing addressing concerns regarding standards and compliance.
- Directed the planning, funding, construction and animal acquisition of the following capital projects: Red Panda Forest (2002); Australia Walk-a-bout - walk-through habitats for over 30 animals including kangaroo, wallaby, emus, waterfowl and perching birds (2003); cotton top tamarin project (2003); and the Zoo Train Railroad - a ½ mile train ride through the zoo (2005).
- Created a Marketing and PR plan which brought the Potawatomi Zoo to the forefront of the community, increasing attendance by 25% within a two-year period and making it the number one cultural attraction and the second most popular tourist attraction in the region (second only to the University of Notre Dame Football).
- Played instrumental role in the Potawatomi Zoo's inclusion as one of the top 20 zoos for families in the June/July 2004 issue of "Child Magazine."
- Restructured the zoo's education department and children's zoo operation, developing programs for thousands of participants of all ages and increasing revenue by 136% over a two-year period, as well as developing and teaching training workshops for educators, volunteers and docents.
- Revitalized the zoo's infrastructure and grounds by partnering with vendors, corporations and service groups, including a Master Gardener and Eagle Scouts, to complete large-scale service projects and gardens.
- Developed a partnership with the University of Notre Dame's Anthropology department to study and conserve New World Primates.

Deering Estate at Cutler - Miami Dade County Parks & Rec (Miami, FL)

Recreation Leader (1999-2000)

Developed ecology and art-based education programs for the grand re-opening of this 325-acre museum and nature center, including tours leading school groups and guests through four distinct Florida Habitats: Mangrove, Sea Grass Bed, Pine Rockland, and Tropical Hardwood Hammock. Provided assistance with special events, grant writing and volunteer management. Coordinated staff for large-scale habitat restoration projects.

Walt Disney's Animal Kingdom (Orlando, FL)**Productions and Attractions Intern (1998)**

Participated in the pre-opening of this 500-acre theme park on "test and adjust period/operations support" for the Kilimanjaro Safaris (Disney's highest visitor capacity attraction). Provided zoological research for Disney's TV Productions syndicated series Secrets of the Animal Kingdom.

Zoo Miami (Miami, FL)**Zoo Intern & Volunteer (1990-1997)**

Developed curriculum and taught education programs such as zoo Camps, field trips and overnights. Conducted a six-month comparative study on the socialization & habitat utilization for gorilla, orangutan and chimpanzee.

Education & Training**Florida International University (Miami, FL)**

Dual Bachelor's Degrees: Environmental Science and English (with relevant coursework including Florida ecosystems, environmental policy and resources, population management, marine and organismal biology, hospitality management, economics and technical writing)

AZA Professional Development

Creating Successful Exhibits and Managing for Success: Career Development

Walt Disney World Internship Program

Hospitality Management & Business Applications

Professional Affiliation/ Presentations

AZA Member: 1998-Present

Okapi Conservation Project Trustee: 2020-Present

SAFE Vaquita Project Coordinator/Alternative Fishing Coordinator: 2016-2018

AZA Animal Welfare Committee Advisor: 2010-2012

AZA Public Relations Committee Member: 2007-2012

AZA National conference presentations: Marketing the LAIR (2013), Elephants and Animal Rights Activists (2010), Special Events-Creative Ways to Drive Attendance (2009), Communicating Wildlife Conservation (2008), Creating Temporary Exhibits (2007), Exhibit Design History (2004), Teaching Zoo History (2003)

Publications & Articles

Zoo & Aquarium Technology: Public Interaction and the Visitor Experience
University of Chicago Press, 2013

Betty & Friends, My Life at the Zoo by Betty White (Contributor*)
Putnam Publishing, 2011

They might be monsters but they need help: Gila monster
Los Angeles Times, 07/31/2006

Looks can be deceiving in the animal world: Okapi
Los Angeles Times, 01/04/2006

Long days spent in bush tracking elusive elephants
South Bend Tribune, 03/03/2005

Lions, hyenas live cutthroat lives.
South Bend Tribune, 03/02/2005

Zoo Clues: A Series about Science- A thirteen week series highlighting Zoo & Aquarium Careers
Miami Herald, Fall 1995.