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Zoo retains five-year national accreditation

The national Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) renewed a full five-year accreditation for Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Sunday during the AZA national conference in Philadelphia.

“The citizens of Tacoma and Pierce County can be proud of their zoo,” said Gary Geddes, director of zoological and environmental education for Metro Parks Tacoma. “AZA accreditation puts Point Defiance among an elite set of North American zoos that meet rigorous standards of animal care, education and conservation. The staff worked diligently to bring the Zoo to new heights since its last accreditation five years ago.”

The AZA accreditation inspection team visited the Zoo in May. Lead inspector and past Accreditation Commission chair John Hewitt noted, “The new synergy between the Zoo, Metro Parks, and the Zoo Society is refreshing and productive and represents a major successful effort by all parties to work together to achieve Zoo & Aquarium goals – a model that could well be emulated in many AZA institutions.”

The AZA is a nonprofit organization that currently accredits 216 zoos in North America, in addition to offering professional training and conservation initiatives. Accreditation criteria include the highest quality of animal management and care, enrichment, conservation, research, education, safety, facilities, guest services, and staff.

“Staff training, experience, dedication and commitment to the zoo and aquarium and its mission is excellent and probably rarely equaled in the (zoo) community,” Hewitt said about Point Defiance.

The Zoo’s accreditation renewal fulfills a promise to Pierce County taxpayers, who approved a tenth of a cent sales tax in 2000 to support the Point Defiance, Northwest Trek Wildlife Park and other parks in Pierce County. Accreditation is a requirement for continued sales tax support of Point Defiance and Northwest Trek.

Hewitt noted, “Overall community support, as evidenced by the recent capital campaigns and collaborative efforts for the zoo and aquarium is outstanding.”

“We’re pleased with the AZA Commission’s findings and truly grateful to Pierce County voters for supporting their zoos,” Geddes said.

In 1999, Tacoma voters approved a \$35 million bond for Zoo improvements. New additions since then include the Kids’ Zone children’s area, the five-acre Asian Forest Sanctuary, Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater, and a new front entrance, gift shop, and café. Animal Avenue, the final phase of Kids’ Zone, opens Memorial Day Weekend 2008.

For more information on Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, visit www.pdza.org or call 253-591-5337.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only Zoo & Aquarium, is located in Tacoma's beautiful Point Defiance Park, 5400 North Pearl Street. Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The Zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).