



For Immediate Release

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Keisha N. Hines, Director of Public Relations and Communications
404.624.5980 –office
404.309.2238 –cell
khines@zooatlanta.org

Simone Griffin, Public Relations Coordinator
404.624.2809
sgriffin@zooatlanta.org

ZOO ATLANTA TURNS 121

New historical markers add curb appeal and visibility to city's oldest cultural destination

ATLANTA – April 1, 2010 – Times have certainly changed since a certain traveling circus went bankrupt in March 1889. Zoo Atlanta observed its 121st birthday on March 28, 2010, commemorating the anniversary of the event that launched the birth of the city's oldest cultural attraction. On that date in 1889, businessman G.V. Gress purchased at public auction the animal members of an ill-fated operation known as Colonel G.W. Hall's Railroad Show and Bingley's Monster European Menagerie and donated the wildlife to the City of Atlanta. The Zoo, which opened the following April as Gress Zoological Gardens, is now one of the 10 oldest zoos in continuous operation in the U.S.

Just in time for the start of Zoo Atlanta's 12th decade, a set of new historical markers now standing at the Cherokee Avenue and Boulevard entrances serve the dual purposes of honoring the past and previewing an exciting future. Commemorated in a ceremony hosted by Zoo and Grant Park Conservancy officials earlier today, the markers provide curb appeal and enhanced wayfinding while adding continuity to a park that is now enjoying new life, thanks to months of collaboration between the City of Atlanta, Zoo Atlanta, The Grant Park Conservancy and the Atlanta Cyclorama. (Another civic contribution from the Zoo's benefactor, the Cyclorama was also purchased and donated to the City by G.V. Gress.)

Designed by Huie Design, an Atlanta based woman-owned environmental design firm, and crafted by Southpeak Construction, the four granite markers represent the first phase of a larger program that will enhance architectural continuity and highlight Zoo Atlanta and the Cyclorama. Funding and project oversight were jointly provided by Zoo Atlanta and The Grant Park Conservancy.

Phase two, already approved and permitted for construction, calls for a signature marker at the corner of Berne and Boulevard, as well as a companion piece for the Boulevard parking entrance. Construction on the second phase of markers will begin once funding is secured.

Historical timeline

1881 – Lemuel P. Grant donates property for a public park in Atlanta.

March 16, 1889 – Colonel G.W. Hall's Railroad Show and Bingley's Monster European Menagerie, a traveling circus, makes an impromptu stop in Atlanta due to financial problems.

March 28, 1889 – G.V. Gress purchases the entire collection of circus animals at public auction and announces his intent to donate the wildlife to the City of Atlanta.

April 6, 1889 – Animals move into newly erected structures in Grant Park.

April 1889 – Nearly 12,000 Atlantans pour into the Gress Zoological Gardens during opening weekend.

About Zoo Atlanta

An accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Zoo Atlanta inspires value and preservation of wildlife through a unique mix of education and outdoor family fun. From well-known native wildlife to critically endangered species on the brink of extinction, the Zoo offers memorable close encounters with more than 1,000 animals from around the world. An all-new carnivore complex, featuring the exciting debut of two new sun bears, is scheduled to open in summer 2010. Zoo Atlanta is also the proud home of Xi Lan, the only giant panda cub born in the U.S. in 2008, and the popular Boundless Budgies: A Parakeet Adventure, the largest interactive experience of its kind in the Southeast. Other highlights include the nation's largest collection of great apes and a global center of excellence for the care and reproduction of vanishing amphibians and reptiles. Zoo Atlanta is open daily with the exceptions of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Keeper talks, interactive wildlife shows, education programs and special events run year-round. For more information, call 404.624.WILD or visit zooatlanta.org.

About the Grant Park Conservancy

Committed to the restoration, preservation and maintenance of the park, the Grant Park Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that raises funding and public awareness for the park. The Conservancy works to tell the story of this historic green space and maintain the park's position as one of the city's most recognized and treasured common assets. For more information, visit www.gpconservancy.org.

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