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APRIL 8, 2019

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Brevard Zoo opens bear habitat

MELBOURNE, Fla., April 8, 2019 — Brevard Zoo guests can now visit the Florida black bear habitat in the Wild Florida section of the Zoo.

The 5,000-square-foot space, which features pools, trees, boulders and other elements that encourage natural behavior, houses a two-year-old female. She represents the beginning of the Zoo's commitment to providing a permanent home for rescued bears, and the habitat can accommodate an additional two to three individuals should the need arise.

The as-yet-unnamed animal was brought to the Zoo last August after Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission responded to a report of a Tallahassee-area woman providing dog food and water to a bear. This could have resulted in a tragic incident as she did not know how to care for herself without interacting with humans.

"She has stolen our hearts already," said Michelle Smurl, the Zoo's director of animal programs. "We know our guests will fall in love with her, too, and we appreciate their understanding while the bear acclimates to her new environment as she may not always be visible."

Guests will notice new interpretive signage and interactive displays that encourage "bear-aware" behavior. Actions such as using bear-resistant garbage cans, keeping grills indoors when not in use and storing food in a hard-bodied vehicle while camping are critical in bear country.

As part of the Give from the Heart appeal at last April's Safari Under the Stars fundraiser, attendees and additional donors contributed more than \$200,000 to the project. The largest gifts came from Tom and Courtney Hermansen and John and Merete Hermansen in honor of Bjørg and Bjørnar "Old Bear" Hermansen; Event Network; Chenzyme Foundation; Nelson Cover, Jr., Gretchen Chell Cover and Nelson Cover III; Walter J. Gatti; Suemarie H. Goodell; Vince Lamb in honor of Helga Lamb; Mike and Mary Louise Coleman; Kehoe Animal Clinic; Thomas and Naomi Simon on behalf of Theodore and Gillian Simon; and the Mollen Family.

Photos: www.dropbox.com/sh/a2zxz5e34v16bi5/AAAcflcAYP7beFaZVKUoi4XFa

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Brevard Zoo is home to more than 900 animals representing 195 species from all over the world. As a not-for-profit organization, it is a leader in the fields of animal wellness, education and conservation. More information is available at www.brevardzoo.org.

Treetop Trek features five aerial obstacle courses that whisk guests above parts of the Zoo and through lush Florida landscapes. More information is available at www.treetoptrek.com.