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PRESIDENT and CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

POSITION SPECIFICATION



THE OPPORTUNITY

Consistently ranked in the top five zoos globally, previously named World's Best Zoo by Travelocity, and currently rated in the top three in the country by USA TODAY, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium seeks a President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to guide the Zoo into its exciting next chapter. The CEO will provide the vision and strategy to lead an organization already established as a trailblazer in overall visitor experience, exhibit design, animal care, and education, as well as animal conservation and research.

Home to the current USA TODAY 10 Best Readers' Choice Best Zoo Exhibit in North America and Best Wildlife Park in North America, Omaha's Zoo is the most visited attraction in Nebraska and a beloved community organization that welcomes in excess of 1.7 million visitors annually. Since 2009, the Zoo has benefitted from [strong leadership provided by Mr. Dennis Pate](#), who will retire later this year. During his tenure at the Zoo, he undertook a 10-year [master plan](#) that resulted in improved guest services and state-of-the-art exhibits, including the [Scott African Grasslands](#), [Asian Highlands](#), [Bay Family Children's Adventure Trails](#) and Daugherty Education Center, and [Owen Sea Lion Shores](#). Mr. Pate was also instrumental in bringing elephants back to the Zoo, resulting in the Zoo's first African elephant births in its 127-year history. These efforts ensured world-class, leading-edge facilities that provide the foundation for the Omaha Zoological Society's aspiration to advance conservation initiatives on a global scale.

Under the direction of its future chief executive, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium aims to build on a tradition of strong leadership, working with a passionate and dedicated community to chart the path for the Zoo's next phase. Priorities include continuing the commitment to animal exhibits that reflect the very best in design, education, conservation practices, and welfare; nurturing an engaged, devoted staff who uplift an organizational culture that is laser-focused on mission; ensuring the organization's financial sustainability to support growth opportunities and conservation; furthering a strong positive brand identity with widespread community awareness of the Zoo's conservation efforts; focusing education efforts to involve and inspire people of all ages to become life-long stewards of wildlife and the natural world; cultivating partnerships with diverse organizations to broaden the Zoo's impact and enhance advocacy; and leading in science-based conservation initiatives that contribute to saving endangered species. The position calls for an individual who is a natural and connective leader who excels at authentically representing the Zoo's mission to all essential stakeholders.

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is a member of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

THE ORGANIZATION

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium's mission is to inspire, educate, and engage people to serve as lifelong stewards for animals, their habitats, and their conservation.

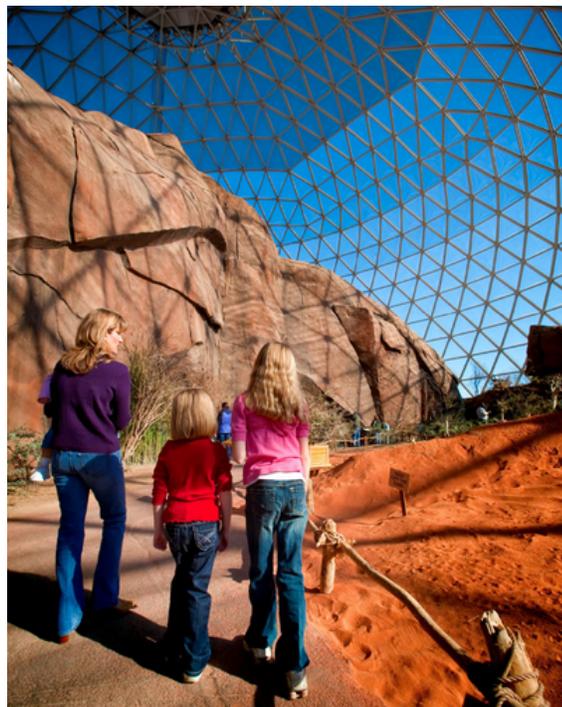
OMAHA'S HENRY DOORLY ZOO AND AQUARIUM SINCE 2020

Omaha's Zoo celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2020. During COVID-19, the Zoo continued to educate and entertain through social media and virtual visits. The organization found new ways of serving their community by offering a limited, drive-through experience of the recently opened [Lee G. Simmons Conservation Park & Wildlife Safari](#) that attracted record numbers of visitors. In the summer of 2020, Owen Sea Lion Shores was unveiled; this state-of-the-art habitat features a 275-thousand-gallon pool, a 40-foot-long underwater viewing window, natural boundaries, an underwater kelp forest, and sandy beach areas. In early 2021, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium and Autism Action Partnership launched a free, all-inclusive mobile app experience, [Omaha Zoo 4 All](#), to help prepare, engage, and inspire visitors with autism or sensory needs. Last year also saw a new permanent home created for the Zoo's stingrays, the planting of the 4-millionth tree assisted by the Zoo in Madagascar, and the opening of the Darrald Harsh Wildlife Education Center at the Wildlife Safari Park. In July 2021, the Lee G. Simmons Aviary reopened with an elevated and on-ground boardwalk and a special section dedicated to flamingo viewing, along with an indoor, nearly 1,000-square-foot flamingo shelter. The completion of this project capped off the 10-year master plan that transformed Omaha's Zoo into a predominately immersive experience. This educational style is reflected in the reopened [Hubbard Gorilla Valley](#), which debuted in August 2021.

Today, the 160-acre location is home to 962 distinct species, with guests experiencing an immersive and educational visit that inspires them to become conservation advocates. The Lee G. Simmons Conservation Park & Wildlife Safari is a 440-acre park located 22 miles west of the Zoo's current site, with the mission of promoting live viewing, educational activities, and conservation programs of native animals to enhance public appreciation for and actions on behalf of wildlife and wild places.

CONSERVATION

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium has built a vigorous program of scientific investigation in the fields of conservation genetics, reproductive sciences, nutritional and behavioral husbandry, and conservation medicine. The Zoo's [conservation efforts](#) are intended to have a global impact through their many in-situ and ex-situ projects and collaborations. All programs place great emphasis on capacity building, student and professional training, technology transfer, and research in the conservation of endangered species. The Zoo's focus throughout the numerous conservation projects that the organization is involved in is to connect their collection to counterparts and counterpart habitats in six primary regions of the world, including oceans, North and South America, Asia, Africa, and Madagascar. Zoo-based initiatives are broad ranging and include projects focused on local species.





EDUCATION

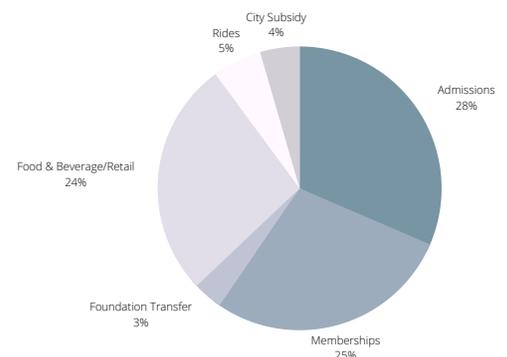
For many, a trip to the zoo is their first and only experience with wildlife. Through contact with animals and dedicated education efforts, Omaha’s Zoo inspires wonder, appreciation, and awareness of the natural world through personal and unique experiences to encourage environmental stewardship. The 15 certified teachers, informal science educators, 60 part-time staff, and more than 450 volunteers of the Education Department play a significant role in conservation education by providing valuable information to visitors on and off site through programs that are designed to enhance science, technology, engineering, and math literacy and knowledge for all ages. Through state, local, and national partnerships, the Education Department has established innovative, nationally recognized [education programs](#) that help empower individuals to take action on a variety of wildlife conservation issues.

For more information about Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, please visit www.omahazoo.com.

GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL HEALTH

The Omaha Zoological Society, a nonprofit, operates Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium on behalf of the City of Omaha. The Society is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors. Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium also has a related nonprofit, the Omaha Zoo Foundation, which is dedicated to raising funds in support of the Zoo’s mission. The Foundation is a public charity and a 501(c)(3). The Foundation has six Board members, some of whom also serve on the Omaha Zoological Society Board. Depending on capital project plans, the Foundation typically raises between \$6.5 and \$50 million annually from private philanthropy. The healthy endowment currently sits at \$110 million. Further information about the Foundation and the Zoo may be found in their Foundation report, [Vision](#), and most recent impact report, [The Future of a Wild Idea](#).

The Zoo operates from a solid financial position and is poised for future growth and success. Historically, annual revenues have been increasing each year and the Zoo has successfully funded substantial organization-wide renovation and construction projects, as well as conservation efforts globally. Projected for 2022 are revenues of \$56.5 million and expenses of \$50.8 million. The major revenue streams include funds from admissions (28%), memberships (25%), food & beverage and retail (24%), rides (5%), city subsidy (4%), and foundation transfer (3%). More detailed information is available in the most recent audited financial statements for the [Omaha Zoological Society](#) and the [Omaha Zoo Foundation](#).



LOCATION



OMAHA

Situated on the bank of the Missouri river, Omaha has long attracted a diversity of residents who value the city’s culture of friendliness, strong work ethic, and Midwestern grit. Residents enjoy the area’s vibrant arts scene, sports (Omaha is home to the College World Series), varied and interesting restaurants, and nightlife. With diverse food, music, and shopping, the city has personality all its own while retaining a low cost of living. Omaha provides a wealth of job opportunities in organizations as wide-ranging as start-ups to the four Fortune 500, or five Fortune 1000 companies that are headquartered in the city. Recently the riverfront and downtown areas have seen substantial investment and revitalization that has created destination neighborhoods in the heart of a city that is still on the rise. The Omaha metropolitan area has a population of more than 900,000.

POSITION CONCEPT AND KEY RELATIONSHIPS

Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium seeks an experienced, results-oriented chief executive who will provide aspirational leadership toward shaping the future direction of the Zoo, building on its status as a world-class destination and leader in conservation and education. The CEO will be the central architect of the path forward and will work with the Board and staff to develop and implement organization-wide policy decisions and strategic planning while representing the Zoo’s mission and brand.



Reporting to the Board of Directors via the Board Chair, the CEO serves as an ex officio, nonvoting member of the Board of Directors of the Omaha Zoological Society, as well as the Omaha Zoo Foundation and all committees of the Board of Directors.

The CEO leads the senior staff and an organization with more than 350 full-time employees. The CEO’s direct reports include a Senior Executive Assistant; the Senior Vice President of Administration/Chief Financial Officer; the Senior Vice President of Operations/Chief Operating Officer; the Vice President of Animal Management; the Vice President of Capital Projects; the Vice President of Conservation; the Vice President of Education. Further senior staff members include the Director of Animal Health; the Director of Facilities Management; the Director of Guest Services; the Director of Human Resources, Safety & Security; and the Director of PR/Marketing. The President and CEO of the Omaha Zoo Foundation reports directly to the Foundation’s Board Chair and works collaboratively with the CEO.



ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS

Under the direction of the Board of Directors of the Omaha Zoological Society and working closely with senior staff members, the CEO is responsible for the following essential functions:

- Sustain excellence at the highest levels, while further evolving and elevating a large, complex, expanding, internationally renowned enterprise to greater levels of prominence.
- Energize, engage, and elicit buy-in from individuals at all levels from volunteers to the Board of Directors. Initiate, nurture, and develop ongoing productive relationships that foster win-win outcomes. Unite different interest groups and entities to facilitate, advance, and enlarge the success of the organization in the local community, as well as its visibility and prominence both nationally and internationally.
- Assess operations, financials, and personnel, as well as competence, to coordinate the efforts of a willing team of professionals and volunteers. Organize and streamline operations to achieve financial objectives while consistently balancing budgets.
- Orchestrate the Zoo's day-to-day operations and ensure continuous operational improvement. Work with a nuanced knowledge of the economic environment and regulatory issues that impact a complex commercial operation.
- Plan, develop, and implement leading edge advancements in the quality of exhibits, collections, and educational and entertainment initiatives in order to continually energize and capture the attention and loyalty of longtime patrons and benefactors. Increase the customer base to attract new supporters and enhance Zoo membership.
- Oversee and orchestrate a self-sufficient, self-functioning virtual "city" that manages its own in-house food service operations with concessions, restaurants, and catering, as well as animal conservation research teams and a comprehensive animal care and veterinary facility.
- Provide continuing leadership for the Zoo's commitment to a culture of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in its community life and across its offerings.
- Assist with planning, orchestrating, and implementing fundraising practices in conjunction with the Omaha Zoo Foundation to render ongoing support and enhance the Zoo's donor list.
- Facilitate and nurture effective communications, keeping all key stakeholders apprised of financial and operational status—including Zoo membership, donors/benefactors, the Board of Directors, government entities, regulatory agencies, vendors, volunteers, and the community at large—to ensure financial transparency and stewardship.
- Provide land and facilities management to include preventive/predictive maintenance and provisions for adequate funding to support, maintain, advance, and enhance the property and facilities infrastructure. Develop and implement physical security measures, park safety procedures, and plan and maintain appropriate insurance to manage risk for employees, volunteers, and patrons.
- Collaborate with Zoo colleagues to facilitate growth in attendance, membership, and funding, as well as to increase mind share and market share within the local and regional community and throughout the national and international marketplace. Elevate and expand educational and research programs.
- Remain up to date on trends and issues in the zoological community to provide leadership that ensures the Zoo remains at the forefront of animal welfare and AZA sustainability needs.



CANDIDATE QUALIFICATIONS

As the public face of the organization, the CEO must possess and project the utmost integrity and highest standards of professional conduct and must be an individual qualified by accomplishment and experience to exercise the leadership of a capable, collaborative, and motivated group of colleagues. We seek an individual willing to make a meaningful professional commitment to the Omaha community as an engaged and immersed citizen. While no one candidate will meet all the desired criteria, the successful candidate will bring most of the following qualifications and attributes:



- Energetic, solutions focused, and entrepreneurial leadership with a minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible management proficiency, which will include executive level experience ideally from tenure with a zoo, aquarium, theme park, or in the tourism and hospitality industry.
- Management expertise gained in an organization celebrated for providing an exemplary guest experience would be of interest. An appreciation for and demonstrated understanding of the nuances of profitable, commercial recreation facility operation is also fundamental to achievement in this position.
- Visible, accessible, and compassionate leadership with superb and tested people development skills. They will create connections that encourage open and honest communication with all team members, focusing on mentorship, collegiality, and staff development. The successful candidate will be an empathetic leader who can train, mentor/develop, and motivate a committed and highly capable staff.
- Possesses the foresight and vision to help the Zoo see the way forward when it comes to philanthropy and its dominant relationship to the advancement of the organization's mission. Demonstrates a record of success and proficiency at fundraising and cultivating donors in both one-on-one and group settings.
- Understanding of a "big picture" vision of how the Zoo's operations and opportunities enrich the community's resources for education and entertainment and propel its efforts at wildlife preservation. A persona of leadership presence and the stature as a leader to assume a strategic role in refining, enhancing, strengthening, and advancing the mission and purpose of the Zoo.
- Actions and decision-making that demonstrate cultural sensitivity, dedication, compassion, and authenticity. This conservation champion will be committed to using the Zoo's platform and community trust to advocate for all aspects of protecting our world.
- Ability to further a genuine customer-centered attitude and the capacity to incorporate the philosophy of the Zoo to encourage positive experiences for attendees and constructive public relations within the larger community. They will serve as a role model for staff toward this pursuit and lead in a hands-on manner, utilizing a shared leadership approach.
- Clear focus on enhancing and strengthening existing programs in order to ensure and advance the Zoo's brand and mission, while possessing the creativity, vision, and business acumen to augment and develop revenue streams.
- Effective verbal and written communication and presentation skills. Track record of being politically aware and astute, while remaining apolitical. Able to build coalitions, facilitate, and blend the interests and resources of disparate groups—from government entities to private finance to benefactors to trusts—to advance the mission and purpose of the Zoo.



EDUCATION

The successful candidate will hold a bachelor's degree, with an advanced degree preferred.

PROCESS

A Search Committee has been established to conduct this search on behalf of the Omaha Zoological Society Board of Directors. This committee is assisted by Shelli Herman and Associates, Inc., a retained executive search firm. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the search firm; all contact will be held in the strictest confidence.

A review of applications will commence immediately. **For full consideration, applications should be received by May 2, 2022. Complete applications should be submitted electronically via email to Shelli Herman at shelli@shellihermansearch.com and should include: a cover letter that articulates a commitment to the mission and outlines relevant experience tied to the job description, as well as a current resume reflecting work experience from college forward.**

CONTACT

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