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## **FUNDING NEEDED TO KEEP THE CAMERON PARK ZOO OPEN.**

We all have a memory or two of visiting our local zoo as children. The sounds of children's laughter and excitement still reverberate with us now as adults. And now that we are adults, we have an incredible opportunity to share that joy with our children.

The Cameron Park Zoo has been that spark of joy for many families. It has also been a great source of educational awareness for countless school children who have come for visits during school field trips. It has taught them in ways that traditional classroom learning has not. For instance, many of the children who visit learn in class that giraffes are herbivores. But, thanks to our feed the giraffe program, they get to feed the giraffe's and see first-hand how giraffe's lack upper front teeth. In short, this means that giraffes have to chew the leaves with their dental pad and their lower incisors. This tidbit of knowledge can be perpetual when seen first-hand. For those young minds, our zoo is one of the most valuable resources they have to learn and experience animal habitats in relative safety. And, unfortunately, for many of those children, the zoo is the only place they will get an opportunity to see these animals without being able to travel around the world.

Our zoo is also a valuable community resource. Throughout the year, we hold numerous events and act as a venue for several community fundraisers in our area. Our annual "Night at the Zoo" event continues to attract over well over 2,000 people each year. And our "Zoo Camp" continues to be sold out year after year. Along with those resources, we are a Central Texas leader in conservation efforts. We provide free education on local wildlife and give federal park rangers needed training. In addition, we help with endangered species and re-introduce whole populations back into the wilds of Central Texas.

However, despite these impressive numbers, the rising cost of maintenance may cause these programs to become canceled. No one enjoys having to spend more money, especially if you are on a strict budget. The simple truth is that we need more funding to maintain not only the animal exhibits but also the programs that are already in place. Currently, our zoo is ranked highest in affordability, and third in local destinations spots according to Central Texas Magazine. And, amongst our peers, our entry fees are still lower by a margin of \$45.00.

I propose that we increase our entrance fees from \$10 for adults and \$7 for children to \$12 for adults and \$9 for children. This \$2 increase will grant us an extra \$130,000 per year, providing for more supplies for the staff, maintenance on the exhibits. This extra funding will also allow us the opportunity to continue many of the programs already in place. This increment is large enough that it will grant additional financing, but it is still small enough to support most family's budgets. By increasing our entrance fee, it will additionally allow us to push our membership passes. Since they can stay at the current price point, we will be able to market the savings for our members. Lastly, let us conduct more fundraisers throughout the year. Our community is our family, and they won't know we need help if we do not ask.

The Cameron Park Zoo is more than just a place to house animals. It's a place for education, fun, and excitement. But most of all, our zoo is a place for memories. Those we've made, and those our children will make.