

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

May 31, 2011

Dear Friend,

A few years ago, my wife and I decided to remodel our kitchen and we were considering a friend of mine to do the work. We met with him to discuss our options, and several hours into the conversation he said, "Your problem is you always try to fit 20 gallons of poop (he didn't say poop) into a five gallon bucket." Anyone who knows me knows this is true. For the last year and a half, I've been trying to fit 50 gallons of elephant, rhino and lion poop into a five gallon bucket.

You can't imagine the discussions you have when working on a Zoo construction project. Just today, I literally discussed (with a structural engineer nonetheless) how much deflection (or sag) a 5/8" cable might have in a critical situation...like when an elephant is trying to get out of its enclosure. Have you ever tried to estimate how much weight a 10,000 pound elephant could put on a cable if she has two feet on the cable and two feet on the ground? Or, what happens to the equation if two elephants each put two feet onto the cable, while simultaneously trying to escape? Or worse yet, what would happen if two elephants each had two feet on the cable, and you moved the support poles from 12 feet to 15 feet apart?

As if that wasn't enough, two hours later I had a legitimate conversation regarding how much reach a meerkat might have, particularly while scaling a vertical wall and reaching out, "rock climber style," around an overhanging ledge. Seriously. I kept referring to an old Sylvester Stallone movie called "Cliffhanger" while people looked strangely away, hoping not to embarrass me. You think I am teasing, but not even I could make this stuff up. When it comes to building animal enclosures, you can't afford not to consider every possible scenario.

The hardest part of the process, really, is taking a construction project that was first bid at over \$12 million and cutting it to \$9.5 million while keeping all the great features that make it a truly world-class exhibit. The cool thing is, I think we have done it. After a year and a half, and countless hours of discussions about meerkats with super-powered eight-inch-long arms and scheming elephants, we are finally just about done. And it's going to be fantastic.

Let me tell you about just a few of the world-class highlights. First, we have a brand-new barn that will be 2/3 the length of a football field; where just one stall is the size of all the elephants' current indoor space. We have gone from an elephant holding space that has just two stalls and one outdoor yard to a space that has six large indoor stalls and seven outdoor yards. We even have an "Elephant Trek," which will provide extensive opportunities for elephant exercise, as well as an "Elephant Vacation Yard," where our girls can rest, relax, and just be elephants. Also included in the exhibit is everything from deep and shallow pools and demonstration yards to hay feeders and shaking trees, as well as oversized scratching logs.

But this exhibit is not just about elephants. It will also include new indoor and outdoor enclosures for black rhinos, African lions, and meerkats. It will be a natural extension of the

work we've been doing at the Zoo over the past several years; bringing people together with animals and nature to provide once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

To help facilitate those experiences, lions will have public viewing of their new indoor space, as well as two large outside yards. They'll also have heated rocks and heated floors and enough training locations to put on one heck of a natural behavior show for our guests.

We're also bringing black rhinos back to our collection, and giving them three new indoor stalls and a new outdoor yard complete with a shallow pool (did you know that rhinos can't swim?). You can't imagine how many times I've heard the story of our old rhino, Cheyenne, lying in a small, kiddie-type pool, trying hard to submerge herself to cool off, with no luck. It's a funny mental image if you think about it. Luckily, our two new beautiful rhino brothers from Texas won't have to figure out the kiddie-pool thing with their new home.

All these examples illustrate the fact that there is more than enough fun to go around with Encounter Africa. And, we are well under the normal price tag of \$25 million per elephant exhibit, which is what you would find at most zoos. In fact, we are developing quite a reputation in the zoo world for getting the most bang for our buck when it comes to building new exhibits.

Finally, just so you can sleep tonight, here is the answer to our conundrum from above. If a 10,000 pound elephant has her two front legs on a 5/8" cable with supports about 15 feet apart, and three meerkats happen to reach over an eight inch overhang with their super orangutan-like strength and join the elephant by tight-rope walking on the bottom strand of the cable barrier, the deflection would be about nine inches. Seriously. Of course, the engineer would tell you the weight of the meerkats is mathematically negligible and that it's just plain silly to think two elephants will work in cooperation to escape a world-class exhibit at the exact same time. In fact, we think that, like our guests, once our animals see their new exhibit, they'll never want to leave. No really, seriously.

Warmly,

Bob Chastain
President and CEO