



**LEGACY AMENDMENT ARTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE GRANT  
Como Park Zoo and Conservatory  
FY 2012/2013 Report Minnesota Legislative Reference Library  
January 15, 2012 – January 15, 2013**

The Minnesota State Legislature approved Minnesota Laws of 2011, Special Session, chapter 6, article 4, Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund appropriations for fiscal years 2012-13: “grants of \$200,000 each year to the Como Park Zoo...for programmatic development.”

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is one of the top visited cultural destinations in the state of Minnesota, with over 2 million visitors each year, because it’s free, interactive, welcoming, and accessible for families. Como Park Zoo and Conservatory celebrates diversity in many forms, across cultures, ethnicity, economics and generations and visitors come from all over the state.

Como has executed the following projects that interweave the arts, culture and history into the guests that participate, along with increasing the number of participates and students that are exposed to the arts and culture.

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City of Saint Paul – Parks & Recreation

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory

1225 Estabrook Drive

Saint Paul, MN 55103

**Grant Budget & FTE Amounts**

\$396,000

3.7 FTE

**Fiscal Agent**

Minnesota Department of Administration

## **Project Narratives & Outcomes:**

### **Music Under Glass**

In January 2012, the first of *Music Under Glass* launched featuring a 6 week series that ended in March featuring local musicians in the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory. The next 6 week summer series named *Groovin' in the Garden* began August 1 running every Wednesday through September 5 and a new series will begin in January 2013 and run 6 times through March 2013.

#### ***Outcome #1 – Provide a community venue to provide local musicians and lectures an opportunity***

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory has been able to provide 12 local bands a venue to perform during the first series. When completed a total of 18 bookings will have performed. A total of six lectures will also have a venue to convey their message and work.

#### ***Outcome #2 – Increase use of facility during non-public hours***

The Music Under Glass was held after public hours, for a total of 12 dates that the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory normally is closed. A total of 4,265 guests enjoyed the series. If not for the grant, the public would not be allowed to use the space.

#### ***Outcome #3 – Use space to create a memorable experience for the guest and talent***

Each week staff asked attendees about the experience and many felt being allowed in the Conservatory at night was very special and that the music added that much more to it. The bands enjoyed the venue and inquired about future opportunities.

#### ***Outcome #4 – Determine a baseline of information, follow-up with after event survey***

For the first two series, we found it difficult to capture user information. Guests did not want to offer personal information or fill out surveys. A different technique is being determined for the next series.

### **Interpretive Graphics**

New interpretive graphics have been installed in our Large Cat Building and Hoofstock Building. Work was completed a head of schedule and under budget. Only preliminary work has begun on the Japanese Gardens. The remaining project balance will be dedicated for the Japanese Garden interpretive graphics and will be complete in April 2013.

***Outcome #1 – Increase knowledge, awareness and interest in topic***

Through visitor intercept surveys we have found the new interpretive graphics have increased the length of time a guest reads a particular graphic screen, along with retaining more of the information.

**EdZoocation Programs**

Two programs were developed under this category. *Nature's Engineers* offered free education classes for pre-school to adults focusing on science and nature through the lens of engineers. These STEM inspired courses were taught by Como educators and were offered free of charge at the schools or groups locations. Three age groups were developed in one to three part series that featured varying lengths and multi-media presentations.

Como developed a free weekly program series, *Lil Explorers* that was held every Thursday January-April 2012 and September 2012 through April 2013. Thirteen different plant and animal inspired themes were chosen to be rotated throughout the course of the 17 weeks. Each week consisted of several discovery stations and a program consisting of a special story time followed by an animal visitor relating to the theme for the week. Themes included: Animals in Winter, Junior Zookeeper, Junior Gardener, Animal Families, Bird Buddies, and Fantastic Frogs.

***Outcome #1 – Increase participant numbers for on-site and off-site programs***

Over 4,000 children, plus their adults have participated in the 34 weeks of *Lil' Explorer* Thursdays from January-April 2012. *Nature's Engineer's* was offered to 22 groups, educating over 475 students.

***Outcome #2 – Increase knowledge in conservation and make connection between living things in our lives***

Each week, Como's education staff asked families and children about their experience. The feedback was always positive, with many adults asking for additional brochures to give to friends and family. Some adults provided suggestions for improvement such as more sensory tubs or activates.

***Outcome #3 – Provide meaningful programs and opportunities to expand knowledge and experience***

In April 2012, adults were encouraged to complete a survey either by hand during *Lil' Explorers* or online to provide more in-depth feedback.

Eighty-six percent of the adults agreed or somewhat agreed that the activities created an appreciation for nature, that their child learned something new during the experience, and that it taught their child something about plants and animals. Eighty-two percent reported their children talked about the experience during the same day or week.

### ***Outcome #4 – Meet and exceed guest expectations***

Overall, *Lil' Explorers* was a favorable experience. Sixty-four percent of the adults visited more than one *Lil' Explorers*, with several families attending every single week. One hundred percent of the participants reported they would recommend *Lil' Explorers* to others.

*"Absolutely! It is the finest early child program that we have experienced. The activities are wonderful and add to her [daughter] knowledge of the world around her. The staff is wonderful with the children and seem to have a real talent for working successfully with small children. A great deal of thought and understanding has gone into the preparation of each session and we look forward to coming back for as many as we can."*

*"While there are always ways to improve any program, I would be hard put to suggest anything at this time. My hope would be that they would continue to do the fine programming in the future."*

### **Special Exhibits**

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory has partnered with the Bell Museum to offer a series of exhibitions in the Gallery. November-January, Saving Endangered Species, February-April, Hidden World of Bears, and April-May, Fruits of Decay. In addition, January featured 'Pollinators - A Portrait Gallery That Goes Beyond Bees' with dramatic close-up images, by Minneapolis artist Bill Johnson.

Como also produced the Edible Garden that opened June 15 and ran through September 2012. The garden hosts a number of education interpreters, along with volunteer master gardeners. Two daily talks and demos are also held, along with a number of special event days that encourage guests on buying sustainable fruits and veggies, how to make their own backyard garden and recipes.

### ***Outcome #1 – Increase off-peak attendance during exhibitions***

The Gallery exhibitions were developed to increase off-peak attendance. While this is difficult to measure solely on one factor like a special exhibit and due to the multiple variables affecting attendance but mostly weather, Como's attendance from November 2011-April 2012 was up 35.7%.

### ***Outcome #2 – Create opportunities to inspire public and educate***

The special exhibitions and Edible Garden has given Como an opportunity to feature a variety of topics to engage the public and relay the mission on to them through these new outlets.

### **Children's & Formal Garden Planning**

This project planning began in late December 2012 and will be completed in June 2013.

### **Theatrical Show Presentation**

Como debuted of the *Mystery of the Plastic Disaster* show on Memorial Day weekend and ran through Labor Day. The message for visitors is on conservation, recycling, and reusing. The original script incorporates a super hero and puppet duo that take on a corporate consumer. The show ran daily 4 times a day.

#### ***Outcome #1 – Meet or exceed goal of more than 200,000 guests touched by the show***

Como decides to move the show from the larger amphitheater to a 'circle in the round' style stage to give it a more intimate feel. The smaller stage also comes with a limited seating area per show, this has dramatically cut the number of touches. Close to 70,000 audience members experienced the show.

#### ***Outcome #2 – Increase knowledge in conservation and make connections between living things in our lives***

Through visitor surveys the message on conservation is very strong; the connection to living things is not as strong. We feel this is related to the fact a puppet is used versus a live animal.

#### ***Outcome #3 – Provide meaningful programs and opportunities to expand knowledge and experience***

The show provides an outlet four times a day for over 100 days for Como to provide a meaningful program with an important message in a fun, interactive way.