

Zoo to You column for Garden City Telegram

By Kristi Newland, Zoo Director

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Topic: Smooth operation takes Maintenance at the zoo.

I do not have the green thumb my father did. There is no doubt about it. I also don't have the mechanical, electrical, etc. skills my husband possesses. Luckily for the zoo we have some unsung heroes in the Maintenance Division that take care of all of those issues.

In the zoo profession, it is accepted that many people don't know all that is involved in the operations of the zoo. Things go smoothly when they visit, so they don't think about all the things that go on behind the scenes that make their enjoyable experience possible. We're okay with that. We want everyone who enters our gates to enjoy themselves, connect with nature, and appreciate the animals. Much of the smooth operation and enjoyable surroundings that make this possible is thanks to the maintenance team.

Have a broken water pipe, automatic waterer not operating so automatically, irrigation gone rogue spraying where or when it's not supposed to? Call Maintenance. How about a pond aerator on the fritz, water heater not lighting, emergency light not coming on, light fixture 20 ft up in the giraffe barn not working? Call Maintenance. Time for the shade sails to come down for the winter, there's a sagging pergola, a section of the public railing broken by a fallen limb, and weeds encroaching on the Butterfly Garden? Call Maintenance. I could go on, but you get the point.

The zoo does rely on some of the businesses in the area as well as other City departments for the specialty work on some jobs, and we greatly appreciate their role in keeping the zoo hopping, but day in and day out, it's the maintenance team. While some of the skills needed for the tasks they face can be learned in a variety of shop classes and similar tasks are faced in other businesses, in their own way, many of the tasks are particular to the zoo and require a different way of looking at things. Consider designing and building a climbing structure for the lions. Besides being safe for and usable by small cubs, it also has to accommodate a 500 plus pound male, as well as the animal care staff who takes care of the lions each day. The structure needs to offer shade and multiple pathways, so no one gets cornered, and it can't contribute to a route out of the habitat (i.e. provide a ramp at the right angle and distance to leap from). Being a social species, sometimes the lions want to be together, but as

individuals sometimes they want their own space. Don't forget it needs to be pleasing to the eyes of zoo guests also. The structure needs to address all those needs and more.

While it may not be within their skillset to control the weather, the maintenance team at Lee Richardson Zoo focuses their efforts each and every day on making sure the zoo residents have a safe, pleasant place to live, their colleagues have a safe place to work, and zoo guests have a safe and enjoyable experience. It's a challenge that keeps the team busy and always brings with it new and interesting experiences.