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Zoo to You: A Holiday Dedicated to Zoo Lovers

Each year there are new holidays added to the calendar which are celebrated by a dedicated group. I've participated in a few of these modern holidays myself. So, ye want t' talk like a pirate aye? Then Wednesday, September 19th is International Talk Like a Pirate Day. Are you a fan of pineapple upside down cake? Then celebrate this delicious cake on Friday, April 20th. Are you a lover of zoos? National Zoo Lovers Day is celebrated on April 8th. This date has already passed, but there are plenty of reasons to love zoos all year long!

Facilities accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) participate in Species Survival Plans. For those not in the know, these plans are cooperatively managed programs that ensure populations housed at accredited facilities are healthy and genetically diverse. So, as more species experience population declines in nature, there will still be a healthy population in AZA facilities. Lee Richardson Zoo recently announced that our female giraffe, Cleo, is expecting; this pregnancy is a part of a Species Survival Plan. The new addition to our herd will contribute to the future population of giraffes at AZA facilities, which is vital since their counterparts in Africa are experiencing a "silent extinction".

Zoos not only support conservation efforts through breeding programs but financially as well. Last year Lee Richardson Zoo donated \$13,535 to a variety of conservation projects nationally and internationally. These funds were raised from paid programs, like birthday parties, as well as purchases from the feeder stations located at the Duck and Fish Ponds. Each time you feed the ducks or rent the facility for your little one's birthday party you are helping Lee Richardson Zoo to support conservation efforts to protect threatened or endangered species.

If those weren't enough reasons to love zoos, don't forget that it's free to walk through Lee Richardson Zoo! If you're on foot, there is no cost to enjoy the resident animals and the beautiful scenery. On your stroll, you might find a Keeper Chat, where you'll get to meet the staff who care for the animals and discover interesting facts about the zoo residents. Or, you and your family might explore the activity stations at one of the many events the zoo hosts

throughout the year; including this month's Earth Day event, April 20th, and 21st. Plus, the first Wednesday of the month, from April to November, and every single Wednesday the other portion of the year is Wild Wednesday. On Wild Wednesday the drive-through entrance to the zoo is free to use.

If you missed celebrating your love of zoos on National Zoo Lovers' Day don't fret! You can show your love of zoos all year long. Support the zoo by "adopting" a zoo animal through the Friends of Lee Richardson Zoo's website. There are a variety of package levels for you to choose from, and the money raised from each sponsorship benefits the zoo. Another great way to support the zoo is to purchase a Rhino or Giraffe Encounter. During an encounter, you'll get an up-close view, and an opportunity to feed some of the largest residents at the zoo. Funds raised from the purchase of Animal Encounters goes toward the cost of caring for the zoo residents and conservation. Animal Encounters take place every Saturday and Sunday once the weather turns consistently warm; follow our Facebook page or check our website to find out when encounters will be starting up this spring. These are just a few of the ways you can show your love and support for Lee Richardson Zoo.

My list for why to love the zoo could go on for days, but just come for a walk at Lee Richardson Zoo, and I'm certain you'll discover your own reasons to be a zoo lover.