



Central Florida Zoo hits \$2.5 million fundraising goal after pandemic closures

Hundreds of individual donors, supporters helped zoo stay open

SANFORD, Fla. – The Central Florida Zoo was among the businesses forced to close during the coronavirus pandemic, creating a deficit in funding used to care for animals and the botanical gardens but after a year-long campaign, zoo officials say they've raised the money to stay afloat. The Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens closed last year for eight weeks during what would normally be its busiest season as the coronavirus raged out of control throughout the world. The closure created a large deficit for the facility and in response, the zoo launched its "No Zoo Without You" campaign in June 2020 to help keep its doors open.

On Thursday, CEO Dino Ferri said the zoo had met its \$2.5 million goal through donations from hundreds of individuals, even school classes and passholders. The Seminole County Board of Commissioners, Seminole County Tourism Development Council and the City of Sanford also made the fundraiser a success, according to Ferri. "It was tough for me to go out and ask knowing that the majority of folks were also feeling financial pressure. It's a



big number, 2.5 million, at a time where you know the majority of the world is facing trouble. So, yeah, we were pleasantly surprised, absolutely," Ferri said. In November, the Seminole County Board of Commissioners approved \$300,000 in tourist development tax money for funding and maintenance of the Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens.

"We think of the Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens as a community place," Ferri said. "And this was truly a community effort, with support coming in everywhere from government sources to schoolchildren. We're so, so thankful." With this milestone met, the zoo will now focus on fundraising to cover improvements for the zoo, according to a news release, which includes updating older exhibits to make them larger and more spacious. The zoo also plans to bring in some new species with lemurs set to make their debut soon. Anyone who would like to donate can do so here. The zoo is home to more than 350 animals.

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