

Essex County Turtle Back Zoo Seeks Volunteer Docents

ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE DIVINCENZO INVITES THE PUBLIC TO SHARE THEIR LOVE OF ANIMALS AND BECOME VOLUNTEER DOCENTS AT ESSEX COUNTY TURTLE BACK ZOO

West Orange, NJ – Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. announced that Essex County Turtle Back Zoo is recruiting volunteers for the 2024 Docent Class. Docents are volunteer educators who give educational talks, act as tour guides, and are stationed throughout the Zoo to provide information to visitors about the Zoo and its animal collection. This is a highly selective volunteer position and training is required.

“Our Docents help every visitor have an enjoyable and memorable experience at our zoo. Whether walking through our zoo grounds or making presentations in schools or at community events, our Docents are volunteer ambassadors who share their love and knowledge about animals and their habitats, and encourage the public to have respect for the environment,” DiVincenzo said. “If you love animals, we encourage you to attend the training course and become a Turtle Back Zoo Docent,” he added.

New Docents must be at least 18 years old and complete a eight-day course instructed by experienced TBZ staff. Applications are due by Saturday, January 12th and applicants will be interviewed on Saturday, January 20th. Training will begin on Sunday, February 4th and continue on Sundays through the end of March. There is a non-refundable fee of \$30 which covers training materials and handouts. The application for the class can be accessed at <http://turtlebackzoo.com/discover/docents-volunteers/>.

Docents must commit to volunteer a designated number of hours/events on at least two selected days a month throughout the year. If interested, please contact the Zoo’s Volunteer Coordinator at tbzdocents@parks.essexcountynj.org.

Turtle Back Zoo is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For additional information, please call 973-731-5800 or visit www.essexcountynj.org.

Docents don’t need a background in biology or zoology, just a love of zoos and an interest in public service. Volunteers are not directly involved with the handling and care of the animals at the zoo.

Revitalizing Essex County Turtle Back Zoo

Currently under construction is a new Barry Ostrowsky Animal Welfare Center. Since taking office in 2003, DiVincenzo has spearheaded over \$100 million in upgrades to Essex County Turtle Back Zoo, which have included creating a new Island Giants Exhibit featuring alligators and Komodo dragons, Amazing Asia exhibit featuring Red Pandas and Clouded Leopards, updating the Turtle Back Junction Train Station to enhance public access; developing the African Adventure with four Masai giraffes, lions and hyenas, and

South African Penguins; the Drill Family Flamingo Exhibit; Leopard Exhibit; a new Educational Building; the Carousel with 33 figures of endangered animals; the Sea Lion Sound Exhibit with sea lions, sharks and sting rays; the Big Cat Country Exhibit with jaguars and cougars; Tam-ring Gibbons Reserve with white cheeked gibbons apes, Reeves muntjac and white naped cranes; Australian Exhibit that features kangaroos, wallabies, emus and over 500 birds in the Aviary; Reptile and Education Center, open air dining pavilion and playground, Penguin Exhibit, Otter Exhibit, Wolf Exhibit, North American Animal Exhibit, Black Bear Exhibit, Animal Hospital, Essex Farm Petting Zoo and South American Animal Exhibit; renovating the Food Pavilion for year-round use and making upgrades to the entrance as well as fencing and infrastructure to meet AZA requirements. Funding has been provided through Green Acres grants, existing capital improvement bonds, or donations from the Zoological Society, Essex County Parks Foundation, corporations or private foundations. Corporations that have provided support include Investors Bank, Prudential Financial, Inc., PNC Bank, PSE&G, Verizon, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, Coca Cola, Capital One Bank, TD Bank, Aramark, Covanta Energy, Matrix Development Group, the family of Ronald Mount and OxyMagic carpet cleaning.

The Essex County Park System was created in 1895 and is the first county park system established in the United States. The Park System consists of more than 6,000 acres and has 23 parks, five reservations, an environmental center, a zoo, Treetop Adventure Course, ice skating rink, roller skating rink, three public golf courses, golf driving range, two miniature golf courses, six off-leash dog facilities, a castle and the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens. Turtle Back Zoo is located in Essex County's South Mountain Reservation and was opened to the public in 1963.