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WORLD'S FIRST ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE ZOO TO BE BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP

Construction is underway at the new Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo

April 22, 2011 (Gulf Shores, AL) – You may have heard, watched or read the story...a seaside community zoo becomes the first U.S. zoo to perform a full-scale, total evacuation during a hurricane. The Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo made headlines in 2004 when Zoo Director Patti Hall relocated over 270 exotic zoo animals, a staff and their families, to her inland home to wait out Hurricane Ivan (category 4 storm). The zoo was destroyed, and while rebuilding, endured two more unprecedented evacuations ten months later during Hurricanes Dennis and Katrina.

If this story doesn't ring a bell, it will... as the Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo announces a construction project, already underway, unlike any other in the world. For the first time in history, a zoo will be built from the ground up that will define every aspect of the term **Green**. Not only will it become the ultimate in sustainability, but also provide a new, almost entirely "hurricane-proof" home to the 400 animals that currently live at the Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo.

Scheduled to unveil Spring 2012, the "new" Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo will strive for the highest recognition in environmental sustainability through LEED Platinum certification (nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of green buildings). Structures and materials used will be non-toxic, natural or organic, biodegradable and recyclable. An array of alternative power sources will be implemented using strategically placed solar panels, wind turbines, geothermal energy (ground source heating pumps), ultraviolet light, and propagated algae as a biofuel. The zoo will supply its own water via captured runoff collection in basins, wells and reservoirs, in addition to growing some of its own food through hydroponic and aeroponic gardening. Waste and sewage management will be controlled on-site through composting, recycling, and incineration. In essence, this "**Amazing Green Zoo**" will become its own living, breathing eco-system!

"Our goal is to achieve as close to a zero-carbon footprint as is attainable given our zoo's diverse population of inhabitants and their living requirements," explains Zoo Board Chairman Steve Jones. "We want to send the message that if "going green" is possible for a zoo, then it's achievable for communities everywhere."

While employing the latest Green methods and technologies behind-the-scenes during daily operations of the facilities, the zoo will also reveal some of its inner workings through educational displays and exhibits to help visitors understand how the future is being brought into the present.

Zoo Designer Dennis Thomas, comments, “We aren’t re-inventing the wheel, we’re simply harnessing the green products and practices that already exist and are successful, and applying them here. Using natural resources, such as sun, wind, water, steam, organic and natural elements to create a healthy and safe environment for animals not only makes sense for *them*, but for *us* as a planet.

Taking on new challenges is nothing new for the tenacious Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo and its director of fourteen years, Patti Hall. Having performed three remarkable rescue operations, Hall and her staff became recognized as heroes. After the first encounter with Hurricane Ivan, Peter Jennings named Hall *Person of the Week* on *Nightly News*, and interviews on *CNN*, *Good Morning America*, *People* magazine and many other news outlets across America ensued.

Patti Hall simply states, “We all knew what our purpose was and that was to save those animals’ lives no matter what. All that we’ve gone through, everything we do now is for the wellbeing of our animals, first and foremost. They are unbelievable motivators.”

By 2006, the zoo’s tumultuous experiences led to something hopeful. Through a Los Angeles television producer’s efforts, their astounding story of evacuations and rebuilding led to a heartwarming series on the cable network *Animal Planet* titled “The Little Zoo That Could.” Donations poured in as viewers witnessed, first hand, the inspiring dedication of Hall and her staff trying to make a comeback to repair the zoo. Hope turned into success and the zoo was able to open its doors 14 months after being completely destroyed. The Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo became a “must see” place on the map and tourism came roaring back for the town of Gulf Shores and its neighboring communities who were still recovering from the hurricanes.

While the zoo is now a well-known attraction, Hall is fully aware that one more powerful storm is all it takes to put the Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo back at ground zero. But that worry isn’t going to last very long, thanks to local businessman Clyde Weir and his daughter Andrea Weir Franklin. In 2006, they generously gifted the zoo with 25 acres of prime real estate, four miles inland on elevated flood-proof terrain. Having been touched by the TV series, these animal-lovers were happy to donate the land towards a brand new zoo.

Building a new facility became complicated over the years by the long-term commitments and financial resources required by a non-profit zoo. In a region hit by natural disasters, then struck by a man-made disaster - the oil spill, Hall needed a new jumpstart and forward-thinking design plan. Kismet stepped in once again, when Hall “bumped into” one of the country’s most innovative theme-park designers, Dennis Thomas, in a parking lot...*everything happens for a reason*. The eventual result of this fortuitous meeting is one for the history books...“**THE WORLD’S FIRST ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE ZOO BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP.**”

It’s also a story ready to be brought back to television. Los Angeles-based producers, Ivan’s Ark Productions in association with Silly Monkey Media, have developed a new series called “**Amazing Green Zoo.**” It will focus on the latest adventures of Hall and her team at the Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo as they learn to go Green!

The new Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo will be located at 20499 Oak Road in Gulf Shores, Alabama. The zoo will sit on elevated terrain protecting it from flooding due to hurricane storm surge and the entire facility will be constructed to withstand Category 5 hurricane winds. www.alabamagulfcoastzoo.org

ABOUT THE ALABAMA GULF COAST ZOO

The Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo is located at 1204 Gulf Shores Parkway, approximately one mile from the beach. It opened in June 1989 as *Zooland Animal Park*. It was founded as a privately owned local attraction by entrepreneur Joey Ward of Gulf Shores, Alabama. In 1991, the Ward family created the Zoo Foundation, Inc., a non-profit corporation, and donated the 17 acres of prime real estate that makes up the current zoo. Three years later, the Ward family and its charitable arm, the Erie Meyer Foundation, donated an additional 13 acres, which are still undeveloped. The current zoo is home to more than 400 animals. Exhibits include lions, tigers, bears, black leopards, monkeys, tropical birds, camels and two islands filled with Madagascar lemurs. There's also a petting zoo, reptile house, aviary and daily animal shows in the summer.

The Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo relies solely on admissions, memberships and contributions to remain in business. The local community and businesses have been generous in donating cash, building supplies and services in years past. Substantial ongoing funding through sponsorships, grants, and endowments from major corporations did not exist before 1998. These additional sources of revenue are now being actively pursued to ensure the zoo's longevity as it goes through another major transformation and builds its new green facility.

The Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo is operated by The Zoo Foundation Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and a 509(a)(2) charitable foundation under section 170, 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Internal Revenue Code. A Board of Directors governs the Zoo Foundation, Inc. Steve Jones is the current Chairman of the Board. Patti Hall is the Zoo Director. www.alabamagulfcoastzoo.org

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**Media contact: Daphne Ortiz/prAlliance
323.864.9890 or daphne@pralliance.net**

To view a video of the new Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo story, go to:
<http://www.alabamagulfcoastzoo.org/AmazingGreenZoo.html>