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News Release

For Immediate Release

Zoo Mourning Death of "Stretch" the Giraffe

The staff of Dickerson Park Zoo is mourning the death of the giraffe “Stretch.” Stretch was euthanized this morning after the animal care staff determined his quality of life was extremely poor with no hope of recovery.

Stretch suffered from severe arthritis. In recent weeks, zookeepers observed an overall decline in Stretch’s body condition, resulting from weight and muscle loss, and he showed difficulty moving between standing and sitting positions. Preliminary necropsy results indicate severe joint degeneration in both hips.

The giraffe exhibit at Dickerson Park Zoo has become one of the most popular stops for zoo guests since the elevated viewing/feeding deck opened in 2004. Stretch was easily distinguished from the rest of the herd because of his size, dark coloration and healthy appetite for the crackers purchased by zoo guests to feed to the giraffes. His massive size made quite an impression on children and adults alike. Male giraffes can reach heights of 17-18 feet and weigh up to 3,000 pounds. Typical life expectancy is 20-25 years.

Stretch was the breeding bull for the zoo’s giraffe program, siring 23 offspring. He was born at Chicago’s Lincoln Park Zoo on Feb. 14, 1987. He arrived at Dickerson Park Zoo in September 1988. At the age of 23 years, 10 months, Stretch was the second oldest living male giraffe listed in the North American studbook.

Dickerson Park Zoo’s giraffe herd now has six females: three adults, ranging in age from 11-18 years, and three juveniles, ranging in age from 9 months to 5 years.

For more information, contact: Melinda Arnold, Public Relations Director, 417-833-1570 (office) or 417-848-0162 (cell); marnold@dickersonparkzoo.org