For Immediate Release

Zoo Saddened by Death of Ol' C.C.

The staff of Dickerson Park Zoo is deeply saddened by the death of “Ol’ C.C.,” the zoo’s oldest elephant.

“C.C. held a special place in the hearts of everyone associated with the zoo and among the community,” says Mike Crocker, Zoo Superintendent. “This is a profound loss for our staff, especially her zookeepers who cared for her every day, and for the community as a whole.”

C.C.’s birth year was estimated to be 1949, making her age approximately 61. She was the zoo’s first elephant. In 1954, Springfield’s Metro Club organized school children to sell peanuts door-to-door, with funds helping to purchase a young Asian elephant from Thailand. She arrived at Dickerson Park Zoo on May 11, 1954, and inherited the public name “Ol’ C.C.,” honoring local weatherman C.C. Williford.

Despite her history of being the lone elephant at the zoo for 25 years, C.C. adapted remarkably well to the social structure of an elephant herd. She became the herd matriarch and a close companion to several elephants. Throughout her years at Dickerson Park Zoo, C.C. traveled to other zoos to be a companion for their elephants. She accompanied DPZ elephant calves Asha and Chandra on their move to Oklahoma City Zoo in 1998, returning once the calves had settled into their new home.

Although C.C. had no calves of her own, she was an invaluable asset to Dickerson Park Zoo’s elephant breeding program as a stabilizing presence and an experienced “auntie” for the calves. More recently, as C.C. moved into her senior years, she retired as matriarch, passing those responsibilities on to the next oldest elephant, “Pinky.”

Because the staff has seen improvements in aspects of her condition in recent weeks, C.C.’s death came as a surprise. She had regained weight lost during treatment for exposure to bacteria. Her blood values were returning to normal ranges. Yesterday, in a follow-up ultrasound, results showed her spinal injury was healing as hoped.

C.C. was being monitored around the clock after her recent diagnosis of a spinal injury. To aid in her healing she was being supported by a sling suspended from support beams in the zoo’s elephant cow barn. She was observed moving around in the stall earlier in the night but was found dead in the early hours of Aug. 4. There were no obvious signs of struggling. The zoo’s veterinarian will be conducting a necropsy to further investigate the cause of C.C.’s death.

C.C. was the fourth oldest elephant living in zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. She was among the 15 oldest elephants listed in the Asian elephant studbook for North America. Members of the public who would like to express words of support to or share their memories of C.C. with her zookeepers can send an e-mail to zookeeper@dickersonparkzoo.org.
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