



# ELEPHANTS AT THE VIRGINIA ZOO

DOING WHAT'S BEST FOR OUR GIRLS



November 3, 2015

## Dear Virginia Zoo Members,

Thank you for all that you do to support the Virginia Zoo and further our mission of conservation, education and recreation. As many of you are aware, last May we announced that the Virginia Zoo staff and Board were embarking on a journey to review the Zoo's elephant program with regards to the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) policies. After much discussion, we spoke with many other zoos that have elephants, visited other AZA-accredited zoos and The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. After much thoughtful consideration, and in an effort to do what we feel is best for our elephants, the Virginia Zoo has decided to follow the AZA recommendations and relocate Lisa and Cita to a new home at Zoo Miami.

We feel that Zoo Miami offers Lisa and Cita the best combination of climate, space, opportunities for social interaction with other elephants, and the strongest opportunity for conservation education.

**CLIMATE** Zoo Miami offers the most optimal climate conditions for elephants. Lisa and Cita will be able to live outdoors, 24 hours a day, 12 months a year, in a larger outdoor habitat that is comprised of soft, natural substrates.

**SPACE** Zoo Miami occupies almost 750 acres, with 340 acres developed. It is home to more than 3,000 animals representing over 500 different species. The Zoo Miami African elephant exhibit is double the size of their current habitat at our Zoo. Zoo Miami is also able to expand their elephant program, and will be soon be implementing a master plan to create even larger habitats for their elephants.

**SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES** Studies of elephants in the wild show that female elephants are very social animals and naturally live in multi-generational herds. Miami is home to a pair of older African elephants, Peggy and Mable. By bringing all four elephants together, they will benefit from more choices in social relationships and an enhanced physical environment.

With an established African elephant program, Zoo Miami offers a comfortable and more easily-managed environment for aging elephants. Having a larger Zoo and animal collection, Zoo Miami employs three veterinarians and an elephant care team solely dedicated to the elephant program. They are able to maintain a more continuous watch over their elephant's health and wellbeing.

The elephants will most likely relocate to their new home in the spring of 2016. The Virginia Zoo will celebrate their significant contributions to the community in the next several months. You can follow the progress and get updates about our elephants at [virginiazoo.org/elephant-news](http://virginiazoo.org/elephant-news). Feel free to send your thoughts and well-wishes to Lisa and Cita at [elephant@virginiazoo.org](mailto:elephant@virginiazoo.org).

The Virginia Zoo has been a part of the Hampton Roads community for more than a century, and during that time zoo professionals and scientists in the field have learned a great deal about animal. This requires us to change programs and practices in order to deliver the highest level of animal care. Some of these changes may not be easy, but it is so important that they are carried out. As we move forward, I can assure you that the entire Zoo staff and I are committed to doing what is best for **all** of our animal residents.

Respectfully,