



**Detroit
Zoological
Society**

**IGNITING
POSITIVE
CHANGE**

A woman with short brown hair, smiling, stands in front of a large mural of a blue whale. She is wearing a grey blazer over a black and white patterned top, a gold chain necklace, and gold hoop earrings. The mural shows the whale's body in shades of blue and white, with a curved metal railing in the foreground.

Dr. Hayley Murphy,
Executive Director
and CEO of the
Detroit Zoological Society



TABLE OF CONTENTS

04	Who We Are
06	What Shapes Us
08	What Moves Us
10	How It Happens
12	Strategic Plan
20	Timeline
24	You Make It Possible





WHO WE ARE

The Detroit Zoological Society (DZS) has always been where life connects — on our campuses, in our community and throughout the natural world. Our history and unique experiences allow us to creatively respond to the crisis facing wildlife and wild places today.

More than 44,000 animal species are threatened with extinction — and that number is growing. The DZS is part of the solution. The Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle Nature Center are home to more than 2,000 animals — each receiving the highest standard of care. Guests connect with these animals through engaging experiences that ignite positive change at home and around the world.

Beyond the borders of the Zoo and Nature Center, the DZS participates in conservation efforts that protect animals and nature. Working with local, regional and international partners, we have helped save endangered species like Great Lakes piping plovers and Wyoming toads from extinction. An emphasis on sustainability supports these efforts, helping communities live greener and restore natural environments.

At the Zoo, Nature Center and throughout metro Detroit, we offer unique educational programs that foster understanding and respect for nature and animals. By providing programming for people of all ages, we hope to inspire everyone to become an advocate for conservation and animal well-being.

Working together, we — community members, donors, partners, staff and volunteers — can make a difference. Now and always, the DZS is a force for positive change, working toward a world where animals and nature are valued, understood and protected by all people.

WHAT SHAPES US

Our purpose, vision and mission statements reflect the DZS's strong connections to people, animals and the environment — and our determination to proactively respond to the challenges wildlife and wild places face locally and globally.

Purpose

We ignite positive change for animals and nature.

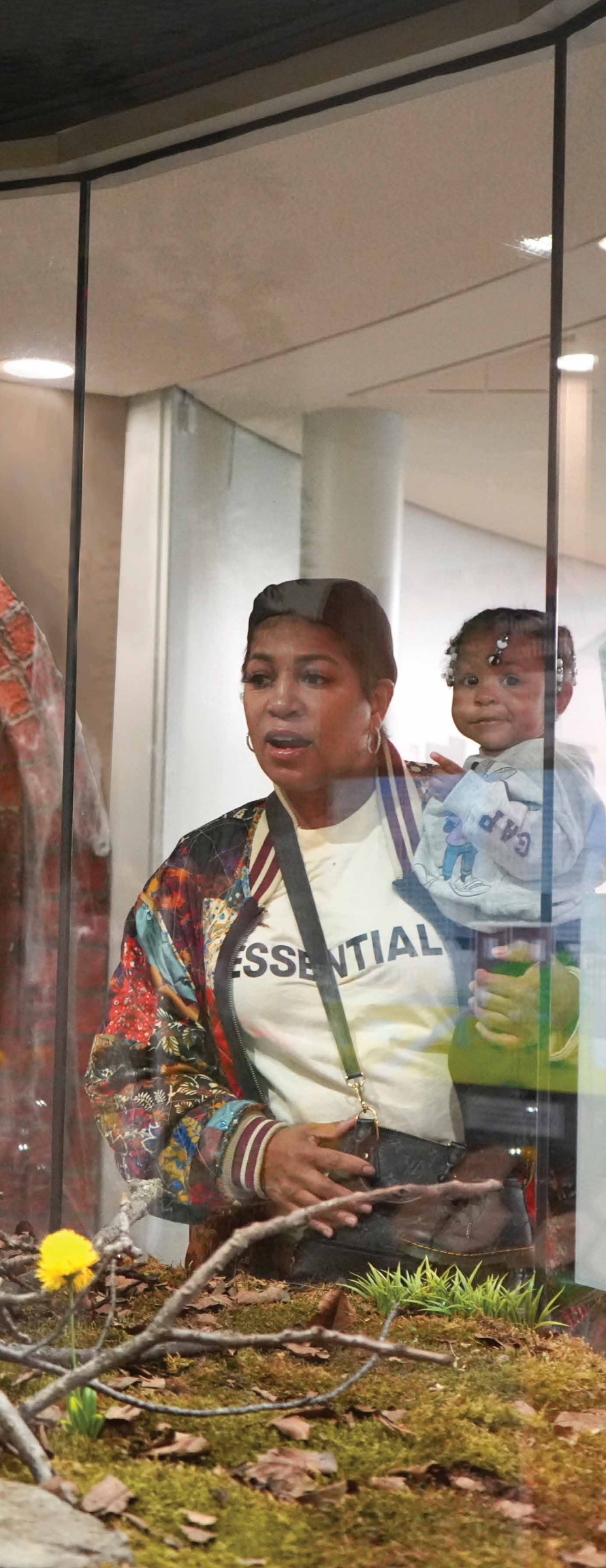
Vision

We are a force for positive change in a world where animals and nature are valued, understood and protected by all.

Mission

We create meaningful connections between people, animals and the natural world so all can thrive.





Core Values

Our core values guide our actions and responses as we live out our mission and vision, ensuring we lead by example to help create a more humane, understanding world.



CARING

We are kind and compassionate advocates for animals, the environment, our communities, our guests and each other.



INTEGRITY

We are trusted stewards who lead with transparency and accountability.



CURIOSITY

We create experiences that open minds to a journey of wonder and lifelong learning.



EQUITY

We provide safe, welcoming, accessible and inclusive spaces for all.



INNOVATION

We inspire creativity and collaboration to promote bold ideas and solutions.

A close-up photograph of a tiger's head and front paws. The tiger is looking down at a large, weathered log. The background is a blurred natural setting with green foliage and a chain-link fence.

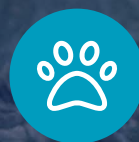
WHAT MOVES US

Four key commitments serve as our compass, guiding every decision the DZS makes as an organization. Rooted in these principles, we address the challenges impacting wildlife and wild places today, crafting innovative solutions to build a stronger future.



PEOPLE

We are committed to cultivating an equitable and inclusive culture by providing engaging experiences that educate and inspire meaningful connections among our community, guests and team members.



ANIMALS

Our commitment to the well-being of animals is grounded in evidence-based care and research. We use science to ensure animals thrive wherever they live.



ENVIRONMENT

We create an understanding of the complex relationships between the natural systems of the living world to support environmental resilience, biodiversity and universal healing.



RESOURCES

Our foundation is built upon demonstrating stewardship of the resources entrusted to us through responsible management and transparent oversight.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Now more than ever, the world needs proven leaders dedicated to creating a brighter future for people, animals and nature. With a bold, new strategic plan, the DZS is prepared to meet tomorrow's challenges and fulfill our purpose, vision and mission.

This plan will guide our actions for the next three years — paving the way for us to increase the number of animal species in our care, complete thousands of sustainability and conservation actions, improve guest and employee satisfaction, grow our operating revenue and so much more.

Whether we are protecting wildlife, empowering communities through education or being responsible with our resources, this plan will strengthen our ability to ignite positive change for animals and nature.





PEOPLE

Cultivating a Welcoming Community

We are committed to cultivating an equitable and inclusive organizational culture by providing engaging experiences that educate and inspire meaningful connections among our community, guests and team members.

Why This Matters

Every individual who engages with the DZS — whether as a staff member, volunteer, guest or supporter — brings our mission to life. We pledge to ensure that every person feels safe, valued and heard, championing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) at every turn. We believe that prioritizing education and community engagement can forge powerful connections that transcend boundaries and enrich lives.

Our Commitments

Be a DEIA Leader

We actively embrace DEIA in every DZS endeavor. We lead by example and encourage others to follow suit.

Open Doors for All

By breaking down barriers, we ensure everyone, regardless of background, can access and enjoy the wonders of the natural world. We identify and dismantle obstacles to meaningful community engagement to achieve this goal.

Empower Our Team

A culture of growth and collaboration allows every individual to thrive and make a meaningful impact.

Prioritize Safety

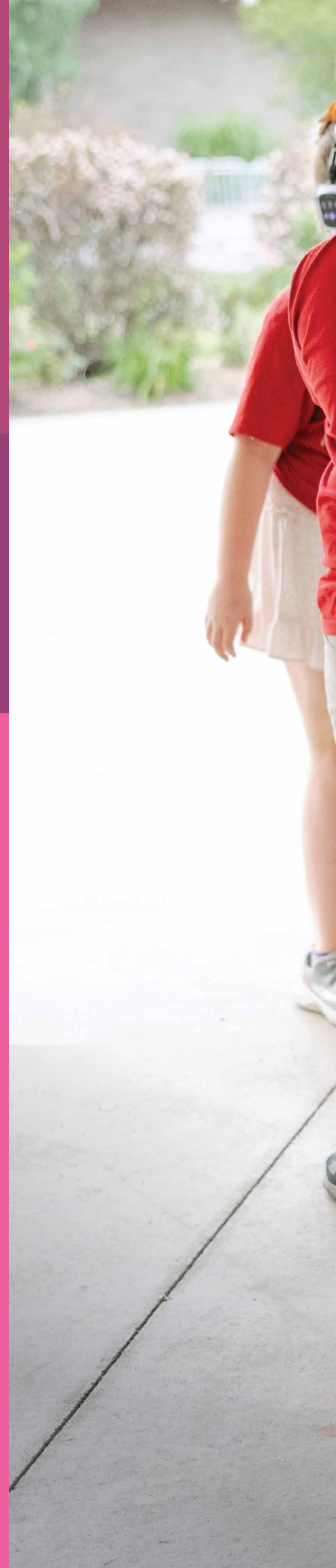
The safety and well-being of the community are our top priorities. We exceed industry safety standards, offer comprehensive training and provide support to ensure everyone feels safe and secure.

Educate Without Borders

Nature holds endless lessons. By expanding educational outreach to historically underserved groups, we share those lessons and create connections to the natural world.

Build Bridges Beyond Our Gates

Through off-site programming and partnerships with local organizations, we bring the magic of science and nature directly to our neighbors.







Strategic Plan



ANIMALS

Excellence in Animal Well-being

Our commitment to the well-being of animals is grounded in evidence-based care and research. We use science to ensure that animals thrive wherever they live.

Why This Matters

Animals — both in our care and the wild — have always been our focus. This commitment to animals goes beyond providing care; it's about creating a home where animals can thrive and guests can connect with them on a deeper level. The DZS sparks positive global change by prioritizing conservation and animal well-being, and by creating connections that improve lives and inspire a brighter future.

Our Commitments

Create Meaningful Connections

The Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle Nature Center are more than just destinations — they are places where lasting memories and bonds are formed. We create entertaining experiences that foster empathy and compassion for animals and nature.

Champion Animal Care

We continuously enhance our animal care practices, leveraging cutting-edge research and expertise to ensure every animal thrives in our care.

Share Knowledge

As a hub for animal education and research, we foster partnerships, share our expertise and embrace innovation to lead the way in animal conservation.

Make Mission-Focused Decisions

Our mission and evidence-based commitment to conservation guide our every move. From meticulous species planning to active involvement in global initiatives, the DZS is steadfast in making tangible impacts that safeguard endangered species.

Achieve High Professional Standards

Actively participating and engaging in Association of Zoos and Aquariums programs and other professional organizations propels our excellence in animal care and conservation.



ENVIRONMENT

Forging a Resilient Future

We create an understanding of the complex relationships between the natural systems of the living world to support environmental resilience, biodiversity and universal healing.

Why This Matters

People and animals cannot thrive without a healthy environment, which is why we prioritize initiatives that protect natural habitats close to home and far away. By placing conservation and sustainability at the forefront of what we do, we are not just safeguarding our future — we are laying the groundwork for a world where all life can thrive.

Our Commitments

Be Conservation Advocates

The DZS doesn't stop at awareness; we ignite action. Through grassroots projects and hands-on initiatives, we empower individuals to effect change in their communities.

Integrate Conservation in Everything We Do

Conservation isn't just an idea. It's a mindset. From programming to daily operations, we integrate sustainability into every aspect of the DZS.

Forge Partnerships for Change

Collaboration is vital to tackling global environmental challenges. Through partnerships with local and global organizations, we enhance and expand regional programs while supporting comprehensive international conservation strategies that impact change.

Lead by Example

Action speaks louder than words. From reducing carbon emissions and waste to pioneering innovative environmental solutions, we actively practice what we preach. We are forging a path towards a more resilient and sustainable future alongside our many partners.







Strategic Plan



RESOURCES

Stewardship in Action

Our foundation is built upon demonstrating stewardship of the resources entrusted to us through responsible management and transparent oversight.

Why This Matters

Our resources are finite, and it is up to us to use them wisely. By making informed decisions and prioritizing transparency, the DZS creates meaningful connections between people, animals and the natural world, becoming a beacon of excellence for future generations.

Our Commitments

Demonstrate Business Excellence

Through careful planning, adherence to business best practices and the oversight of our resources, we are laying the foundation for a future where the DZS thrives.

Grow With Our Community

Our success is measured by the connections we forge and the lives we touch. Building lifelong relationships with our supporters ensures that the DZS remains a vibrant and vital part of the community.

Invest in the Future

Philanthropy is a crucial source of support for our mission. By aligning fundraising efforts with our strategic priorities, we grow our supporters' impact on the programs and projects that make the DZS a force for good in the world.

Demonstrate Impact

Our mission extends far beyond our campuses. Through strategic communication and enhanced community engagement, we amplify our impact by bringing guests along for the journey — no matter where they reside.

1911

Caring members of the community form the DZS to plan a world-class Zoo in the heart of metro Detroit.



1928

The Detroit Zoo opens to the public on Aug. 1, 1928. The seasonal Zoo included bear dens, lion dens, a birdhouse, an elk yard, raccoon and wolverine habitats, an African veldt and lakes stocked with fish.



1931

The miniature railroad – now known as the Tauber Family Railroad – opens after being donated by the Detroit News.

IGNITING POSITIVE CHANGE FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY

For decades, the DZS has been dedicated to advancing animal well-being, conservation, education and environmental sustainability. Building on this strong foundation, we are committed to igniting positive change for animals and nature — at our campuses and around the world.



1939

The Horace Rackham Memorial Fountain, one of the Zoo's most recognizable landmarks, is dedicated.

2000

Amphibiville, home of the National Amphibian Conservation Center, opens.



1995

The Ron Kagan Wildlife Interpretive Gallery, which houses the Matilda R. Wilson Free-Flight Aviary and the Butterfly Garden, opens.

2001

The Arctic Ring of Life, one of North America's largest polar bear habitats, opens.



1960

The Holden Museum of Living Reptiles – now known as the Holden Reptile Conservation Center – opens.

2004

The Ruth Roby Glancy Animal Health Complex opens to provide expert veterinary care to the animals who call the Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle Nature Center home.

2005

Elephants Winky and Wanda move to California in order to live and roam in an expansive sanctuary.



1955

The Great Ape House – today reimagined as the Great Apes of Harambee habitat – opens.

2006

The DZS assumes daily operations and financial management of the Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle Nature Center.



2020

The DZS wins the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums Environmental Sustainability Award.

2016

The Polk Penguin Conservation Center, one of the largest penguin facilities in the world, opens.



2012

The Cotton Family Wetlands and Boardwalk opens.



2021

Longtime CEO Ron Kagan retires. Dr. Hayley Murphy, DVM, takes over the helm as executive director/CEO of the DZS.

2009

The Center for Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare and Ethics is established.



2022

The Belle Isle Nature Center reopens following a \$2.5-million renovation.



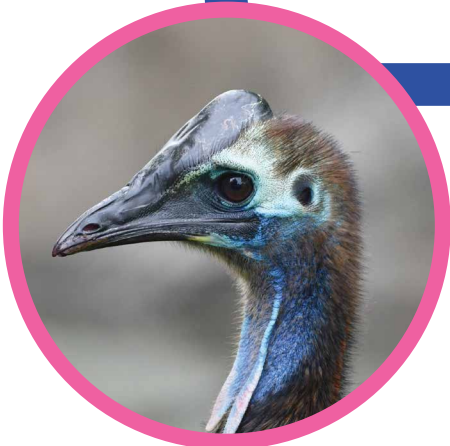
2008

Voters in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties approve a property tax millage to help support Detroit Zoo operations.



Today

The DZS continues to thrive as an organization where animals, nature, people and resources are valued.





YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE

Dedicated supporters like you help bring our purpose, mission, vision and strategic plan to life — and we can't thank you enough. Every member of the DZS family makes a meaningful difference for animals and nature every day, including:



More than
45,000 member
households



Residents of **Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties** who provide millage support for the Detroit Zoo



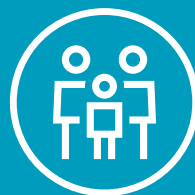
Donors who contribute
approximately **\$10 million**
annually



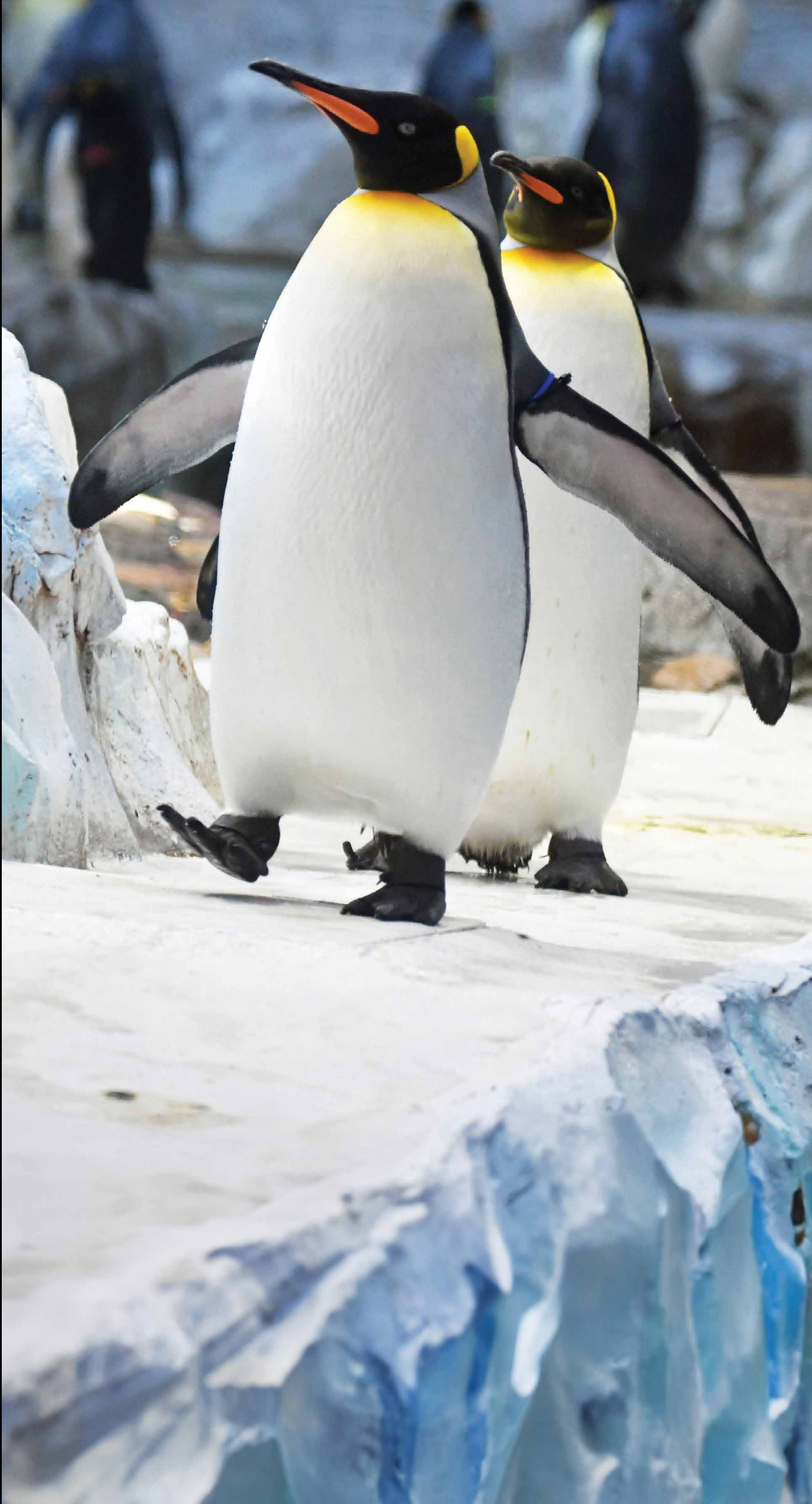
More than **500 full-time, part-time and seasonal staff**



Nearly **1,500 volunteers** who
donate their valuable time



More than **1.2 million guests** who
visit the Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle
Nature Center each year.



detroitzoo.org
belleislenaturecenter.org



[detroitzoo](https://www.facebook.com/detroitzoo)
[belleislenaturecenter](https://www.facebook.com/belleislenaturecenter)



[detroitzoo](https://www.instagram.com/detroitzoo)



[detroitzoo](https://www.tiktok.com/@detroitzoo)



detroitzoo.org/blog



[detroit-zoological-society](https://www.linkedin.com/company/detroit-zoological-society)

**Detroit
Zoological
Society**



**Belle Isle
Nature
Center**

**ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS**



detroitzoo.org | 8450 W. 10 Mile Rd | Royal Oak, MI 48067 | 248-541-5717

PUBLISHED: SPRING 2024