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LARGER THAN LIFE: BRONZE SCULPTURE HONORING BELOVED GORILLA’S MEMORY TO BE UNVEILED WEDNESDAY IN POINT DEFIANCE PARK NEAR ENTRANCE TO ZOO

Tacoma, Wash. – Ivan. The one word name has been recognizable in Tacoma, the Puget Sound region and around the world for more than half a century.

The western lowland gorilla, who grew up with a local family, lived in a shopping center and ultimately found a home among members of his species in an award-winning gorilla habitat at Zoo Atlanta, will be honored Wednesday with the unveiling of a bronze sculpture in his memory.

Ivan died at age 50 in 2012.

The more-than-5-foot-tall, 600-pound sculpture depicts Ivan holding a magnolia blossom, curiosity reflected in his eyes. It replicates a photograph of the gorilla taken shortly after his debut at Zoo Atlanta in 1995.

The statute sits in Point Defiance Park on a landing near the stairs leading to the main entrance of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

The Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners formally accepted the sculpture by resolution Monday night. It is a gift to the park district – and the people of Tacoma – from the Friends of BelovedIvan group, which raised more than \$220,000 for the project. The artwork alone is valued at \$165,000.

The larger-than-life-size bronze, which is about 5 percent bigger than the gorilla himself, was designed and created by Northwest artist Douglas Granum, who employed state-of-the-art 3-D techniques in its construction.

A team of local talent helped with all aspects of the project and fund-raising.





Ivan at Zoo Atlanta

Photo courtesy of Zoo Atlanta

They established the www.belovedivan.org website and a Facebook page where members of the public could share their memories of Ivan.

The Irwin family, which once cared for the great ape, sought a fitting spot for a tribute.

Although Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium does not exhibit gorillas – and the species has never been in the zoo’s animal family – the Irwins felt there was no better place in Tacoma to honor Ivan’s memory than at facility dedicated to conservation.

Metro Parks Tacoma commissioners agreed shortly after Ivan’s death to set aside a spot within Point Defiance Park – and near the zoo – for a sculpture.

Now, the memorial is nearly complete. Though the sculpture is installed, still to come is a series of interpretive panels that will help visitors learn about Ivan’s legacy and the perils gorillas face in the wild. Their numbers are drastically diminishing, and the gorilla species is listed as critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

“We are pleased that this beautiful and fitting memorial of Ivan now stands in a public spot within Point Defiance Park,” Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners President Erik Hanberg said. “Its location outside one of the Northwest’s premier zoos, a place dedicated to the care and conservation of endangered species, reminds us all of the need to cherish the animals that inhabit the earth with us.

“We are confident that visitors will come to view this sculpture of Ivan and learn about actions they can take to help gorillas in the wild.”

Granum, who put a lifetime of experience with various media to use in the creation of a remarkably exact likeness of Ivan, is pleased the sculpture and educational materials to accompany it will teach generations about the beloved Tacoma icon.

“This was not work; it was truly a labor of love,” Granum said. “I was the artist, but this could not have been accomplished without the help of a number of organizations and individuals. I owe a debt of gratitude to The News Tribune, which graciously allowed us to replicate a photograph taken by Dean Koepfler at Zoo Atlanta; the Irwin family, which owned Ivan when he lived at the B&I shopping center; Form 3D Foundry of Portland; Two Ravens Studio foundry of Tacoma; and the team with whom we worked.”

Those who advocated for the memorial are thankful for the community outpouring of love for the gorilla

“Our vision was to create a sculpture that would draw people from across Washington state – and perhaps from around the world,” said Ron Irwin, son of longtime B&I owner Earl Irwin. “It is our hope that those who come to see the sculpture will be inspired to learn more about Ivan’s story and about gorillas in the wild,” he added.

“We are grateful to the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation; the Ruth Foundation, a legacy of the Gary E. Milgard Family Foundation; and other members of the community who stepped forward during our fund-raising drive to make this dream a reality.”

Only an estimated 125,000 western lowland gorillas remain in Western equatorial Africa. About 250-to-300 Cross River gorillas are estimated to live in Cameroon. But estimating gorilla populations is difficult, and scientists believe there are somewhere between 2,000 and 10,000 Grauer’s gorillas and just 800 mountain gorillas in Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Here are some additional facts gathered by the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Education Department from a variety of gorilla conservation and scientific sources.

- In the time since Ivan was legally taken from his wild family in the 1960s, all gorilla hunting has become illegal. However, poaching remains a widespread problem and gorilla populations are declining dramatically. Gorillas are still the target of hunters who kill adults and sell the babies.
- Ivan’s memory can best be honored by helping gorillas in Africa where his story began. All species of gorillas are endangered. Their populations are in serious decline due to poaching, loss of their forest habitat, and exposure to diseases from people.
- Several conservation groups are working to protect endangered gorillas.

Established in 1995, the Wildlife Conservation Society’s Mbeli Bai Study is the longest running study on the western lowland gorillas – Ivan’s species. They continuously monitor hundreds of gorillas in their forest homes to better understand their habits and conservation needs.

The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International protects endangered gorillas through anti-poaching efforts and conservation education programs. They also provide assistance to local communities through education, health, training and development initiatives.

- Between 2010 and 2014, 52 zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums took part in a variety of field conservation projects benefiting gorillas. Over those five years alone, the AZA community invested \$4.5 million in gorilla conservation.

Links to these conservation efforts are available at www.pdza.org/helpgorillas.

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