



St. Louis Zoo Plans New Stingray Exhibit

Visitors can touch, feed ocean creatures

ST. LOUIS – St. Louis Zoo visitors will watch, touch, and occasionally feed stingrays at a new temporary exhibit next year – “Stingrays at Caribbean Cove.”

With construction beginning near Lakeside Café, plans call for 23 stingrays gliding through a 17,000-gallon saltwater pool within a tropical setting. The exhibit is scheduled to open in May and will run through September 30, 2009.

The pool will be designed for easy navigation by cownose and southern stingrays. Both are hardy species that interact well with people. In addition, both species lend themselves well to feeding from visitors in a safe and fun manner.

“This will give our visitors a unique, hands-on experience with some fascinating oceanic animals,” said Dr. Jeffrey P. Bonner, president and CEO of the St. Louis Zoo. “Connecting people with wildlife is an important part of our mission. Not everyone in our part of the world has had the chance to get in touch with ocean life in such a close-up intimate way.”

Cownose rays and southern rays are distantly related to sharks and skates. They have a flat body, long pointed fins and a long whip-like tail that they use in defense. At “Stingrays at Caribbean Cove,” their stingers will be painlessly clipped with a nail clipper. Staff at the exhibit will monitor the stingrays throughout the season to insure no stingers exist.

Visitors will have the chance to feed the stingrays at various times throughout the day. The mouth of a ray is conveniently located on the underneath side of its body, which gives it easy access to bottom-dwelling prey, such as smelt and shrimp.

They have a row of five gill slits on their underside and additional openings, called spiracles, on the top of their body just behind their eyes. Spiracles help the rays

breathe more easily. Rather than sucking sandy water in through their gills, they can pull clear water in through the top of their body and expel it through their gills.

The pool at “Stingrays at Caribbean Cove” will be 20 inches deep, complete with a waterfall and a state-of-the-art life support system. There is a stingray resting area where the animals can swim away from visitors if they choose. When the exhibit opens in May, there will be a nominal admission charge of \$3 for the general public and \$1.50 for Zoo Friends. Children under two will be free. The first hour of the day will also be free.