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SPECIAL TO THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-GREEN BAY
ENVIRONMENTAL AND BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

Sustainability Plan Will Help Secure the Future of the NEW Zoo

Ashwaubenon, Wis. - Neil Anderson, director of the Northeast Wisconsin Zoo (NEW Zoo), believes sustainability is the key to the zoo's future success.

"Making our zoo operations more sustainable is the right thing to do," he says. "Through sustainable practices, we can provide better living conditions for the animals, a better visiting experience for our guests and better working environments for our employees."

Like many organizations and businesses the zoo faces a changing economy, increased sensitivity to environmental conditions, the need to provide a stable work environment and retain good employees, all while providing products and services of value to its customers. The NEW Zoo is among a group of only six of the 216 American Zoological Association accredited zoos and aquariums in the country that do not receive local or regional public tax support for its annual operations. So, aside from providing a natural adventure that promotes recreation, education and conservation through encounters with live animals, economic sustainability has become a major reason Anderson is interested in applying sustainable practices to their operations.

About two years ago, Anderson recognized the emerging trend towards sustainability and could foresee what benefits it offered the NEW Zoo. Preservation of animal species, their environmental role and habitats are an inherent goal of many zoos. Anderson believes he is faced with a dual challenge including preservation of animals and their natural environments but also demonstrating his facility itself can function in a highly sustainable fashion.

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Located in Suamico (northern Brown County), the zoo has grown in recent years and now is home to animal species from all over the world. The facility covers 43 acres and has 35 structures housing animal exhibits, education facilities and operations.

Anderson is working with sustainability experts from the Green Bay-based consulting firm Foth to complete a Strategic Sustainability Plan.

“Foth offers the right combination of skills and a proven process for helping us move ahead in developing an effective plan, and implementing the plan,” says Anderson. As a first step, Foth integrated existing business and operations plans, policies and accreditation requirements relative to sustainability into a planning process. A lot of research and raw data was gathered on the subject of sustainability by zoo leadership and an initial challenge for Foth was to select and then integrate relevant information into a planning process. Foth will also hold a workshop to gather input from staff and key stakeholder groups to identify possible strategies and tasks that will help the zoo become more sustainable.

An environmental footprint of the facility is being developed as well. This will serve as a baseline of the facility and primary emphasis will be in the areas of water, wastes and energy. Developing an environmental footprint can be overwhelming, so the zoo is looking to identify the most immediate factors that come into play. Water, wastes and energy cover much of that objective. Annual reviews of the facilities' environmental footprint will allow progress to be measured.

Anderson, like many organizational managers, sees some of the low hanging fruit in energy management especially given the availability of public and private financial incentives. Energy management is one critical contributor to sustainability but without including other elements, organizations might miss out on achieving a broader base of benefits. Proper planning for sustainability will require the zoo stakeholders to think in terms of systems. Discussions will involve conversations about the interplay between the various elements of its operation. Use of the triple bottom line concepts (balancing economy, environment and societal benefits) will help guide discussion and metrics of the Strategic Sustainability Plan. During the course of plan

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development, Foth will facilitate processes using “The Natural Step” systems conditions to help place stakeholder input and recommendations in a sustainable framework. Upon completion, recommendations are expected to be considered within the 2010 budgeting process of Brown County.

Foth provides customized sustainability services including consulting, planning, environmental science and engineering solutions to public and private organizations throughout the Midwest. To learn about applying the benefits of sustainable thinking to your organization contact Jim Loreti or Fred Schnook at Foth at 920-497-2500.

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Additional Information

Fred Schnook, Sustainability Consultant at Foth is leading a team working with the NEW Zoo to develop a Strategic Sustainability Plan. Schnook joined Foth in 2006 after 20 years in workforce development and local government. His experience applying sustainable principles to organizational goals includes involvement with developing a 20 year comprehensive plan as mayor of Ashland, WI. The plan set the stage for Ashland to become the second designated eco-municipality in the U.S. The designation helped the community leverage state and federal funds for infrastructure improvements consistent with sustainable principles. As a result, the local community received significant infrastructure improvements with far less local impacts to its residents than would be expected. Similar strategies await other government organizations and potentially private companies to help gain funds to implement recommendations of sustainable ideas.

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