



NEWS RELEASE

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Santa Barbara Zoo Remembers its Visionary First Director, Edward “Ted” McToldridge

Zoo’s first employee passes away, leaving a tremendous legacy for animal care and conservation

(March 22, 2022) Santa Barbara, CA - Edward “Ted” McToldridge, the first director of the [Santa Barbara Zoo](#) and perhaps the person who did the most to shape the early years of the Santa Barbara Zoo, has passed away at the age of 92.

“Ted dedicated his life to building the Santa Barbara Zoo,” said Rich Block, President/CEO of the Santa Barbara Zoo. “His passion for animal care ran deep, and his vision and dream for what this place could be has truly become a reality that millions of guests from near and far get to enjoy today. Ted instilled in us the privilege we share working in the care and conservation of the animals at the Zoo. He cherished his staff and animals so much and leaves a tremendous legacy for us all. He will be dearly missed.”

A local contractor, McToldridge was the Zoo’s first employee, hired in 1964 as Park Superintendent (title later changed to Zoo Director) by the Child Estate Foundation. His interest in animals began with a collection of hedgehogs he cared for while growing up in England.

McToldridge led the organization through its early development, while often caring for the animals and maintaining the grounds himself. He remained at the Zoo’s helm for more than three decades. Exceedingly resourceful, McToldridge managed to build a lot of the Zoo with very little money. His creativity and eye for aesthetics is evident everywhere on Zoo grounds, from lush landscaping, donated by local nurseries and Lotusland, to the original animal exhibits that he designed and built himself.

Under Ted’s leadership, the Zoo grew from a dream to a multi-million-dollar nonprofit organization and a beloved community treasure. It was his vision to create a world-class zoo. Today, the Santa Barbara Zoo hosts nearly half a million visitors each year, is consistently ranked as Santa Barbara County’s top tourist attraction, and is recognized as one of America’s finest zoos, maintaining accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums since 1982 and delighting millions of guests since its doors opened in 1963.

After retiring in 1997, Ted’s wish for the Zoo endures: that its most profound contribution to conservation comes from teaching young people about the wonders of nature and instilling a sense of awe with a dedication to action.

Ted McToldridge was born in London, England in 1930. He is survived by his loving wife of 19 years, Nancy; his children Tina York (Todd), Terri Stewart (Mike), Teddy McToldridge (Michelle), Tara Weilbacher (Drew); and his grandchildren Zechariah, Elijah, and Jude York, Lauren, Samantha, and Jack Stewart, Colten, Daisy, Scarlet, and Talon McToldridge, and Marie and Finley Weilbacher.

The McToldridge family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be sent to the Santa Barbara Zoo in Ted's memory to continue his life's work and honor his legacy.

About the Santa Barbara Zoo

The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA zoos are dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great guest experience, and a better future for all living things. With its more than 200 accredited members, AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation and is the public's link to helping animals in their native habitats. Visit www.sbzoo.org to learn more.

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