



NEWS RELEASE

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Santa Barbara Zoo President & CEO Rich Block Announces Retirement in 2025, National Search Has Begun

(February 5, 2024) Santa Barbara, CA – The [Santa Barbara Zoo](https://www.santabarbarazoo.org/) announces President & CEO Rich Block's intention to conclude his tenure and retire at the end of January 2025. Serving as the Zoo's leader since 1998, Block leaves a lasting legacy of growth, achievement and innovation, leading the cultural icon through its most transformative period in its history. While Block will remain President & CEO until a successor is named and he steps down a year from now, the Zoo's Board of Directors has formed a Transition Committee and a rigorous national search has begun. The Committee hired Los Angeles based executive search firm Shelli Herman and Associates to identify the Zoo's future leader, who will help usher in the next chapter for the Zoo.

Jim Jackson, the Zoo Board Vice Chair, is leading the search efforts, and praises Rich Block's tenure. "Rich's visionary leadership over the past quarter of a century has led to an incredible transformation of the Zoo, and his impact will be felt for years to come. His passion for wildlife conservation and education has not only enhanced the Zoo but has also deeply impacted our community. We are excited about what is next for the organization and will build on this strong foundation to continue being a local employer of choice and a leader in the industry, setting standards for animal care, conservation, and guest experiences in this country and beyond."

Under Block's stewardship, the Santa Barbara Zoo has seen significant advancements in animal care, conservation efforts, and guest experiences. His commitment to the Zoo's mission has been a driving force in the numerous achievements and recognitions the organization has earned during his tenure. Highlights include becoming the first zoo on the West Coast to be designated a Certified Autism Center, creating a preschool program that became California's very first licensed outdoor preschool, and being one of only six accredited zoos in the country to work with California condors, helping to bring them back from the brink of extinction. He is also paving the Zoo's way for long term success by spearheading a groundbreaking conservation partnership with California State University Channel Islands, the first of its kind in the country. In addition to his Zoo responsibilities, Block volunteered his time at numerous organizations, including serving on the Board of Directors of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and as the Chair of the California Association of Zoos & Aquariums (CAZA).

"It has been my great honor to lead such an important and beloved organization," said Block. "Working alongside the very best staff, board members, volunteers and community partners, to help fulfill the Zoo's mission has been nothing short of tremendous and I am grateful for the opportunity to have made a difference. We have achieved milestones that fill me with immense pride, and I'm excited for the Zoo to

continue evolving. I know our team, along with the next President & CEO, will continue to foster a bright future for the Zoo and those we serve.

“Since my arrival in 1998, the Zoo has enjoyed and benefited from the generous support of the community, making all of our new exhibits, renovations, and engaging education programs possible. Getting to know and spend time with our donors and members has been a highlight of my career at the Zoo.”

Block's retirement marks the end of a remarkable era of leadership and dedication to the Zoo and its mission. The national search for a new President & CEO is a testament to the Zoo's commitment to maintaining the high standards set by Block and continuing its mission to inspire conservation of the natural world through education and engaging experiences.

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 visitor experience, and a better future for all living things. With 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.

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