

TOM STALF AND BRAD DEHAYS THE COLUMBUS ZOO, RWANDA AND THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA

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Brad DeHays was joined by Columbus Zoo President and CEO **Tom Stalf** for today's program. Brad and Tom just returned from a trip to Rwanda.

Before the program got underway we were treated to a **Milt Lustnauer** video production depicting Milt's impression of what Brad and **Jaeleen DeHays'** trip to Rwanda must have been like.

Brad led off the presentation noting that planning for the trip was begun three months in advance. Tom had put out a request to a number of Zoo board members about a trip in conjunction with the Diane Fossey Foundation. A special dedication ceremony was planned in which the Columbus Zoo had been asked to participate.

Brad called the experience life-altering. While the gorillas of Rwanda were the focus of the trip the interaction with the people and the exposure to the culture turned out to be most impactful for Brad. Further, what the Zoo has accomplished with philanthropic dollars – primarily from Columbus – is truly amazing.

Tom Stalf is in his ninth year as President and CEO of the Columbus Zoo. Overall he has spent nearly

thirty year in the "zoo business". He first met **Jack Hanna** in 1995. Due to his tenure in the business he serves on many boards and with many organizations related to his profession. He serves as the Chair of Field Conservation for all of the zoos and aquariums in the United States. Combined, they raise \$240,000,000 per year for field conservation efforts.

Tom credited the Columbus community for its support which enables the Zoo to operate but also helps in the organization's mission to give back to the community and to give back to the animals.

Thirty years ago a volunteer at the Columbus Zoo wanted to take care of gorillas. She met **Diane Fossey**, who was in Columbus on a book tour. Fossey was an American conservationist who had moved to Rwanda. When Fossey saw how the Columbus Zoo's gorillas were cared for and how they interacted and bonded with the keepers she invited the zoo to send a representative to Rwanda. Upon visiting Rwanda it quickly became apparent that to help the gorillas it was necessary to help the local people. This is how the Columbus Zoo's program entitled "Partners In Conservation" (PIC)



Upper Arlington
Rotary
Club



GREETERS

March 5

David Hatch
Nick Vlasidis

March 12

Bob Bracco
Matt McClellan

March 19

Kevin Aschliman
Susan Moffett-Bruce

REGISTRATION DESK

March 5

Andy Livingston
Tom Westfall

March 12

Jim Winfree
Kevin Brown

March 19

Larry McVey
Milt Lustnauer

CALENDAR

March 5 | Confluence Park

12:30 pm Special Start Time and Location

Brad DeHays
Downtown Development Update and the Trolley Barn Project

March 12 | Raymond Memorial

Stacie Boord
Shadowbox Live

Host: Johnson

March 19 | Raymond Memorial Program TBA

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

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OUR NEXT MEETING

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got its start. The PIC organization has been raising money privately for the people in Rwanda and for helping gorillas since its inception. When Diane Fossey first started there were about 90 gorillas. Now there are one thousand. Mountain gorillas live only in Rwanda, Uganda and Congo.

Tom currently serves on the Diane Fossey Board and is the Chair of the new Ellen DeGeneres campus. This trip was for the groundbreaking of a new research facility.

We saw a video trailer that was prepared for those folks about to embark on the trip. Brad shared a map of Rwanda noting how small the country is in relation to its neighbors. Trip participants flew into the Rwandan capital of Kigali. In preparation for the trip an extensive array of shots was required to avoid medical problems.

Security is high in Rwanda – probably due to the fact that there are armed security forces everywhere as a deterrent.

A slide presentation accompanied the balance of Brad and Tom's remarks. We saw pictures taken during various phases of the journey. Brad commented on the large number of local citizens along the roadways carrying various goods. The group's arrival at the dedication ceremony was greeted with drums and dancers. This was a common greeting wherever the group went during the trip.

We saw photos of the group at the dedication ceremony for the research facility – which is located right at the base of a volcano. There were a good number of familiar faces from Columbus.

Tom told us that the Columbus Zoo started its conservation efforts in about 1983. Things were going well until 1994 when a Rwandan genocide took place. One million people were killed in 100 days. The Hutu and the Tutsi tribes were the main combatants. People fleeing the genocide were fleeing into the gorilla habitat in the mountains. The group's host/guide on this tour witnessed the killing of his whole family. Ultimately, forgiveness among the people became the main focus and now they have all come together. Rather than being divided on the basis of tribe the population now see themselves as Rwandans.

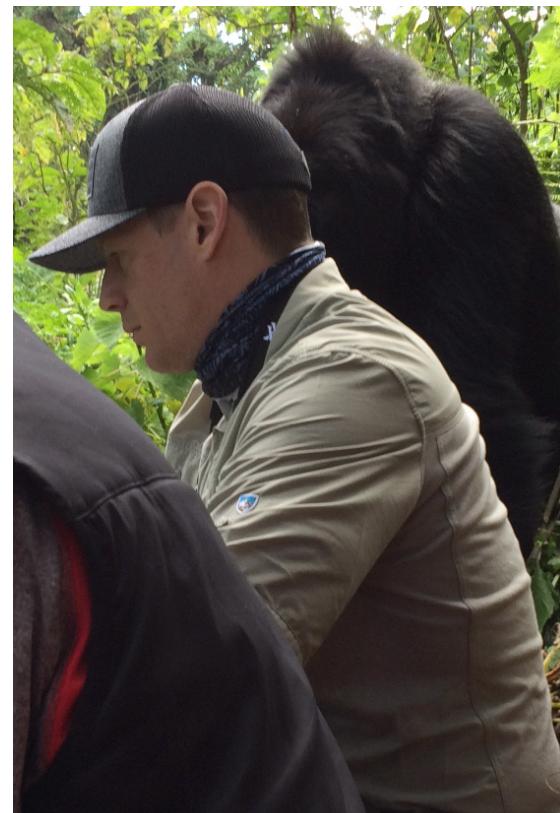
Rwanda is also the cleanest country in Africa.

Everyone, once a month, stops what they are doing to clean up the streets and the communities.

The Columbus Zoo has 82 conservation projects in 41 different countries. The zoo plans trips specifically to these project locations. When people go on these trips they meet with the conservationists and the resident experts. They will learn about the challenges, successes and failures of each project.

Brad emphasized the friendliness and the joyfulness of the people – particularly the children – during the trip. Gifts (soccer balls, e.g.) were presented to children at various stops and it was impressive how they shared and seemed focused on playing together with no sign of issues about sharing or playing together.

Tom shared that in the past locals would not care for the animals. Instead they would poach them for body parts for sale in the black market. This was their source of revenue. Through education and information the poachers have been turned into trackers and, in some cases, veterinarians. We saw pictures of a school which has been established with help from the Columbus Zoo and the Fossey Foundation.



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We heard about a guide named Francois who is the only tracker who was originally a porter for Diane Fossey. He is the top guide in Rwanda and is a good friend of Jack Hanna. He has been with the gorillas every single day for 38 years. The gorillas are so comfortable with him that he can sit with the gorilla families at times.

We saw a 24,000 square foot school that began as an orphanage. It was funded by the Columbus Zoo. The school is no longer an orphanage. It is now for everyone but with a focus on people with disabilities. Artisan works by students are bought by the zoo, resold here in Columbus with proceeds from the sale going toward conservation programs. Brad noted that the walls of the school contain photos and plaques featuring people with familiar names from Columbus. It is evidence of the positive impact on peoples' lives that their support yields.

The Columbus Zoo sponsors Rwanda Fete in September each year. It supports important schools and programs of this nature.

Finally, we were apprised of the zoo's long time support for programs in Guatemala. The zoo's program is called ARCAS. ARCAS confiscates animals from poachers, rehabilitates them and releases them back into the wild.



The trackers who are trained at this school have turned from poaching for income to using their skills as trackers as a source of revenue. They are paid to take people into the mountains to show them the gorillas. Brad commented on the contagious smiling of his guide.

The country has built a wall around the national forest. The Volcanoes Park National Forest is located at the border of Rwanda, Congo and Uganda. The wall was built to separate the national forest and the gorilla habitat from the important agricultural fields of the country. Every single section of available land is used for agriculture. The wall is designed to protect the gorilla habitats from encroachment. There is currently a movement to move the wall further out to expand the gorilla habitat.

Brad shared numerous picture of gorillas encountered during the trek into the jungle – including one where the gorilla came up behind him and was within inches. Brad could feel the gorilla's breath on the side of his face. The tracker/guide advised Brad to sit down and avoid showing the gorilla his teeth.

One part of the visit included a stop at what is called Poachers' Village – a depiction of what life was like back in time in Rwanda.

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The Meeting



President Brad DeHays opened the meeting and asked **Ralph Griffith** to offer the invocation and lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Ralph also shared a poem called "Imprints of Service" written by his late father about the value and importance of service.



There were no visiting Rotarians today. **Tom Westfall, Connie Aschinger** and Brad DeHays introduced their respective guests.

We were reminded that next week's meeting (3/5) will be at the Boathouse/Confluence Park. The meeting will run on a 30 minute delay – with lunch being available at 12:00, the meeting/program starting at 12:30 and adjournment at 1:30.

Brad reminded us of the sad news about the passing of **Joanie Dugger**. Family and friends' visitation will be Sunday, March 3 from 1:00 to 5:00 PM at Schoedinger Northwest chapel. Reach out to Brad directly if you missed information about memorial contributions

Notes and Announcements



Peggy Concilla noted that invoices for the Annual Fundraiser/UA Rotary Foundation had been distributed by email last week. She emphasized that checks for this purpose must be made out to the UA Rotary Foundation – not to the club and not to the Rotary International Foundation.



Andy Livingston, UA Rotary Foundation Treasurer, read a letter from the Community Shelter Board highlighting the good that has been done with the financial support of the UA Rotary Foundation over the past four years.

The combined support over the last four years has been enough to prevent three families from becoming homeless and also help three men and women move from the shelter into a stable home. **Doug Goddard** has spearheaded this effort.



Chip Knoop thanked those members who joined him for the "bed brigade" last weekend. (**Jim McGovern, Jim McKinney, Tom Westfall**) Nine beds were delivered to a family in the OSU area and the joy and excitement expressed by the mother and children was gratifying and a symbol of the good that is accomplished by such projects.

Chip, on behalf of **Dave Dewey**, also highlighted the current District 6690 drive for Rotary International Foundation contributions. He reinforced the point that this drive should not be confused with the contributions made to the UA Rotary Foundation. They are two different campaigns.