



{FEATURE}

A ZOO OF DISTINCTION

{BY MELISSA LINDSAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MINNESOTA ZOO FOUNDATION}

Who doesn't love penguins? Ask any child: "They walk funny. They huddle together to stay warm. They're great swimmers. And they are soooo cute!"

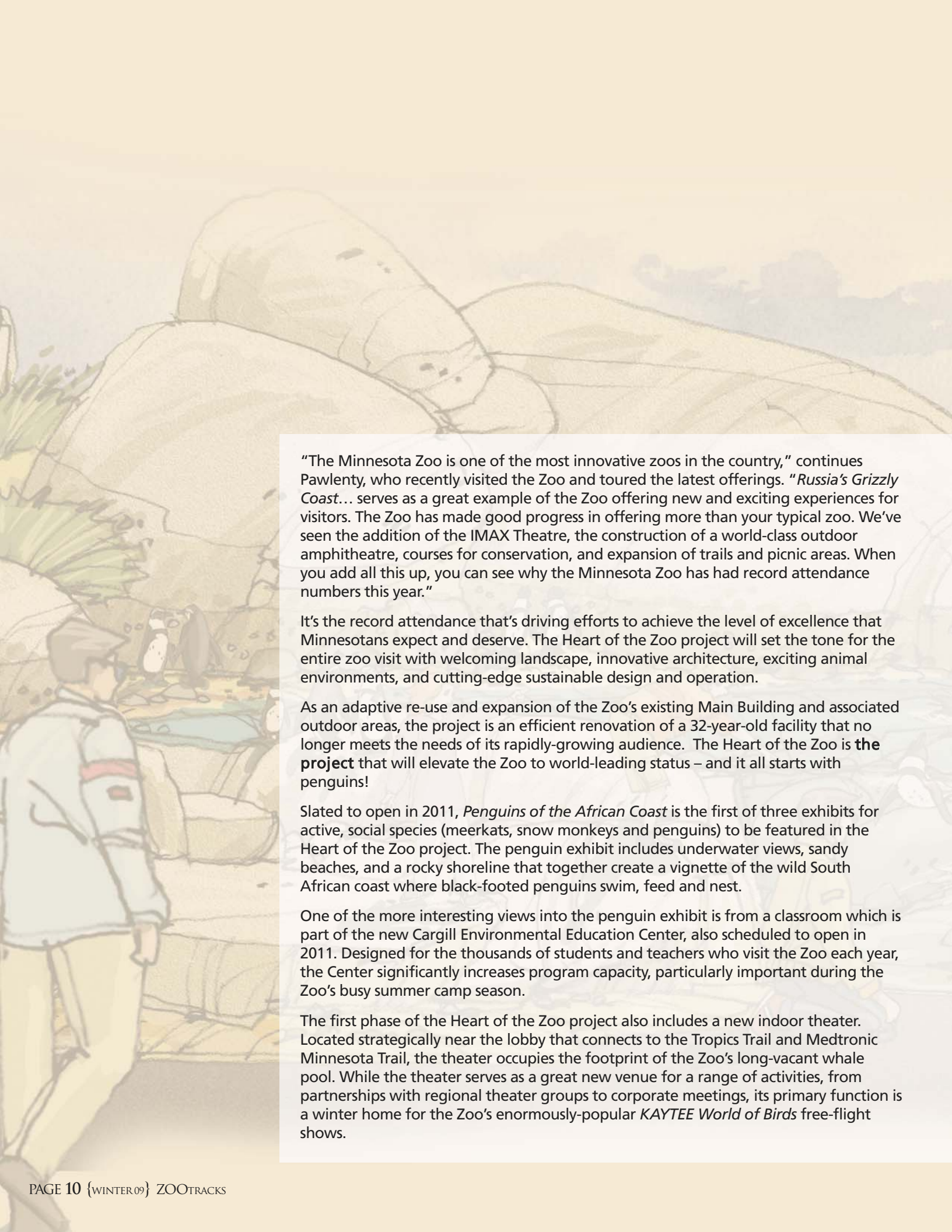
Imagine the excitement, then, when kids of all ages (and their parents too) learn that the Minnesota Zoo plans to open a new penguin exhibit in 2011.

"Following the extraordinary success of *Russia's Grizzly Coast* exhibit and the popularity of our three bears, we wanted to bring yet another charismatic species to the Zoo that would capture the imagination of our guests," says Minnesota Zoo director Lee Ehmke. "Penguins are among those animals that people of all ages adore."

The Zoo's new *Penguins of the African Coast* exhibit is just one of many new projects envisioned for the Zoo over the next several years. It will be part of Heart of the Zoo which will complement other recently-completed improvements at the Zoo, including the Medtronic Minnesota Trail, Central Plaza, Woodland Adventure, and *Russia's Grizzly Coast* – named the best new exhibit in 2009 by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

"The work that we have accomplished over the past four years is thanks to the extraordinary investment made by both the public and private sectors," continues Ehmke. "We are well on our way to achieving our goal of becoming one of the top 10 zoos in the country thanks to this strong partnership."

According to Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, legislators from all parties have made it a priority for the state to help the Zoo provide award-winning recreational, educational, and conservation programs. "We've come together and agreed that what's good for the Zoo is good for Minnesota," says Pawlenty. "The Zoo has done a wonderful job joining up with some of Minnesota's best companies. Whether it is the Medtronic Minnesota Trail or the Wells Fargo Family Farm, there's been a great partnership between the Zoo and companies looking to make a difference in our community."



“The Minnesota Zoo is one of the most innovative zoos in the country,” continues Pawlenty, who recently visited the Zoo and toured the latest offerings. “*Russia’s Grizzly Coast...* serves as a great example of the Zoo offering new and exciting experiences for visitors. The Zoo has made good progress in offering more than your typical zoo. We’ve seen the addition of the IMAX Theatre, the construction of a world-class outdoor amphitheatre, courses for conservation, and expansion of trails and picnic areas. When you add all this up, you can see why the Minnesota Zoo has had record attendance numbers this year.”

It’s the record attendance that’s driving efforts to achieve the level of excellence that Minnesotans expect and deserve. The Heart of the Zoo project will set the tone for the entire zoo visit with welcoming landscape, innovative architecture, exciting animal environments, and cutting-edge sustainable design and operation.

As an adaptive re-use and expansion of the Zoo’s existing Main Building and associated outdoor areas, the project is an efficient renovation of a 32-year-old facility that no longer meets the needs of its rapidly-growing audience. The Heart of the Zoo is **the project** that will elevate the Zoo to world-leading status – and it all starts with penguins!

Slated to open in 2011, *Penguins of the African Coast* is the first of three exhibits for active, social species (meerkats, snow monkeys and penguins) to be featured in the Heart of the Zoo project. The penguin exhibit includes underwater views, sandy beaches, and a rocky shoreline that together create a vignette of the wild South African coast where black-footed penguins swim, feed and nest.

One of the more interesting views into the penguin exhibit is from a classroom which is part of the new Cargill Environmental Education Center, also scheduled to open in 2011. Designed for the thousands of students and teachers who visit the Zoo each year, the Center significantly increases program capacity, particularly important during the Zoo’s busy summer camp season.

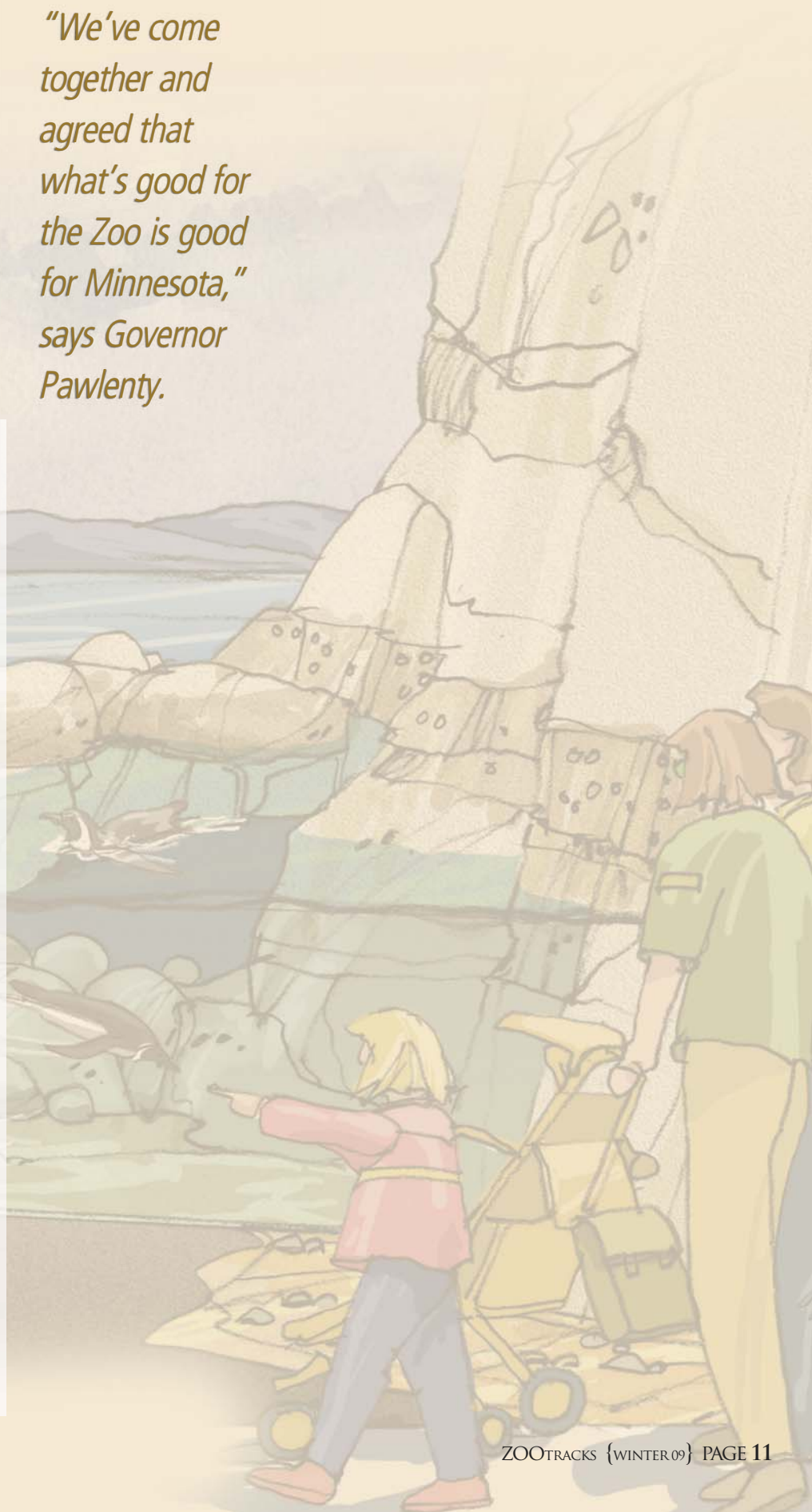
The first phase of the Heart of the Zoo project also includes a new indoor theater. Located strategically near the lobby that connects to the Tropics Trail and Medtronic Minnesota Trail, the theater occupies the footprint of the Zoo’s long-vacant whale pool. While the theater serves as a great new venue for a range of activities, from partnerships with regional theater groups to corporate meetings, its primary function is a winter home for the Zoo’s enormously-popular *KAYTEE World of Birds* free-flight shows.

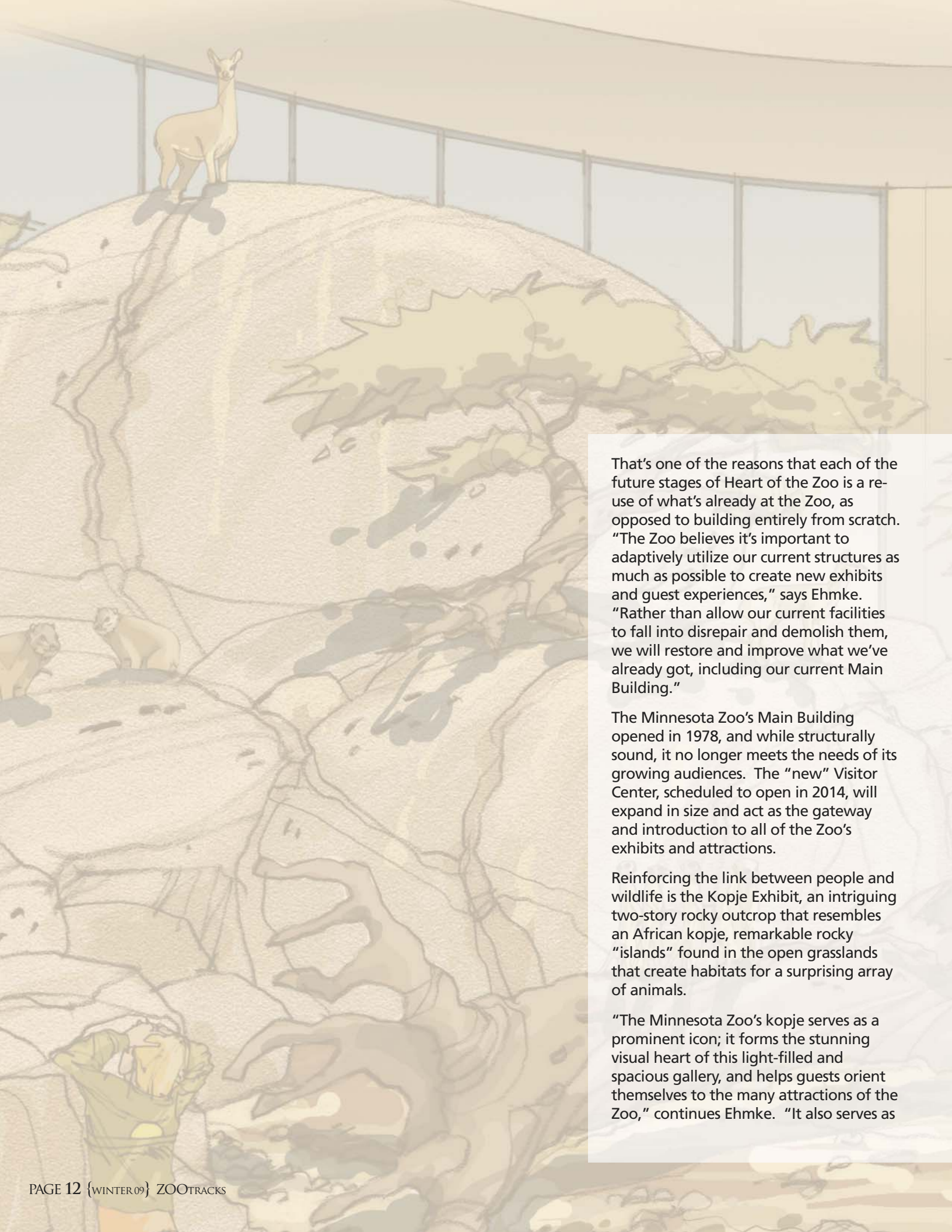
"We've come together and agreed that what's good for the Zoo is good for Minnesota," says Governor Pawlenty.

"This first phase sets the stage for the entire Heart of the Zoo project and addresses each of our three core mission principles: education, conservation and recreation," says Ehmke. "In addition to an extraordinary new animal exhibit, a new education facility and theater, we also are creating a new interim main public entrance to the Zoo."

"The completely re-designed South Entrance welcomes all guests to the Zoo until the subsequent projects are completed, at which point this greatly improved space becomes the welcoming and assembly location for schools and other groups," continues Ehmke. As part of the Zoo's efforts to demonstrate best practices in sustainable design, construction and operation, an attractive and environmentally-responsible "green roof" will be constructed over the covered walkway and the adjacent Cargill Environmental Education Center.

"The Zoo is committed to conducting its operations and activities in ways that minimize negative impacts on the environment," says Ehmke. "The entire Heart of the Zoo project is designed to promote sustainability, as well as to demonstrate Minnesota's strong commitment to the conservation of its resources and the natural world."






That's one of the reasons that each of the future stages of Heart of the Zoo is a re-use of what's already at the Zoo, as opposed to building entirely from scratch. "The Zoo believes it's important to adaptively utilize our current structures as much as possible to create new exhibits and guest experiences," says Ehmke. "Rather than allow our current facilities to fall into disrepair and demolish them, we will restore and improve what we've already got, including our current Main Building."

The Minnesota Zoo's Main Building opened in 1978, and while structurally sound, it no longer meets the needs of its growing audiences. The "new" Visitor Center, scheduled to open in 2014, will expand in size and act as the gateway and introduction to all of the Zoo's exhibits and attractions.

Reinforcing the link between people and wildlife is the Kopje Exhibit, an intriguing two-story rocky outcrop that resembles an African kopje, remarkable rocky "islands" found in the open grasslands that create habitats for a surprising array of animals.

"The Minnesota Zoo's kopje serves as a prominent icon; it forms the stunning visual heart of this light-filled and spacious gallery, and helps guests orient themselves to the many attractions of the Zoo," continues Ehmke. "It also serves as



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home to a community of animals that would naturally co-habit a kopje: rock hyrax, klipspringers, and a large group of the ever-popular, highly-social meerkats who patrol the lower reaches of the kopje habitat.”

The lower level of the Visitor Center provides year-round access to the Tropics Trail and Medtronic Minnesota Trail, the Food Court, Discovery Bay and the exit to the Central Plaza and all of the Zoo’s outdoor exhibits. The lower level also houses the new Cargill Environmental Education Center, Kids’ Den, *Penguins of the African Coast*, and a new home for the Zoo’s snow monkeys.

Snow monkeys are among the most adored creatures at the Minnesota Zoo, and their newly-remodeled home provides these remarkable primates with more complex space, lake views, and a natural “hot spring” pool while offering guests close encounters and expanded interpretive opportunities. The most cold-adapted of all primates, these incredible monkeys are comfortable and active at all times of the year in our Minnesota climate.

The final Heart of the Zoo project, the Prairie’s Edge Entry and Trail, establishes an immediate connection between guests, wildlife, and wild places. In contrast to the current Zoo entries, dominated by architecture, this final project showcases a landscape with four iconic prairie species to welcome guests to the Minnesota Zoo: bison, elk, prairie dogs, and cranes.

Once guests enter through the sculptural “prairie grass” gates, they see herds of bison and elk, high on the hill to the left. Spreading over an open area at the foot of the hillside, a prairie dog village allows guests to view these active and interesting animals both above and below the ground. On the opposite side of the visitor pathway, tucked below a densely-forested rise, a pair of sandhill or whooping cranes share a quiet glade with waterfowl and turtles.

All of these animal encounters happen before guests approach a green-roofed shelter leading into the Visitor Center. The intent is to create a strong sense of arrival at the Zoo, and to make palpable the Zoo’s mission of connecting people, animals and the natural world. As the state zoo, it seems appropriately inspirational to begin and end each zoo experience by reminding guests of the incredible natural heritage of our own “eco-region,” the remarkable interface of prairie, forest and wetlands of Minnesota.

"...By improving our guests' experiences, by expanding our educational capacity, and by sharing our conservation stories about wildlife here and around the world, the Zoo and its guests will make a difference to wildlife both here at home and around the world," says Lee Ehmke.

Governor Pawlenty shares that commitment to our state's natural heritage. "I believe the Zoo's success is partially because it's an extension of Minnesota's passion for the outdoors. Whether it's fishing or taking a long hike, enjoying nature is part of who we are and what we love. The Zoo and its mission are a good fit when considering our state's heritage and legacy."

Ehmke concurs. "The Minnesota Zoo serves as a catalyst for bringing people of all ages together and engaging them with the natural world. The Heart of the Zoo project, through conservation, education and recreation, will connect our guests with nature and help them understand its relevance to our lives. By improving our guests' experiences, by expanding our educational capacity, and by sharing our conservation stories about wildlife, the Zoo and its guests will make a difference to wildlife both here at home and around the world."

MINNESOTANS FOR A GREAT ZOO

Minnesotans for a Great Zoo is the name of our new grassroots network of Zoo volunteers, members, donors and other supporters. They believe that the Minnesota Zoo is one of our state's most important educational institutions, a leader in local, national and international conservation efforts, and an important community gathering place for all Minnesotans. The group will help build public support by telling the story of why the Minnesota Zoo is state treasure that warrants continued investment.

We invite you to join Minnesotans for a Great Zoo. Visit ourmnzoo.org and sign up today!