

Pokemon Go, summer camp part of zoo outreach

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — When you think of Cape May County Park and Zoo, most locals and tourist alike think of the wonderful animals as well as the lovely grounds of the park where families can have a picnic, use the “Tree to Tree” obstacle course or just have a game of catch. People having normal, Norman Rockwell style of summer fun is what is expected there.

But from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday, Aug. 5, a different game of “catch” will be available at the park and zoo for children and (let’s be honest) a few adults to enjoy. Instead of just seeing animals, patrons will be able to catch and hold animals with names such as Bulbasaur, Charmander and Pikachu.

If you don’t remember learning about these animals the last time you visited the zoo, it just means you are not playing the latest craze Pokémon Go. If you are playing the game, you will understand how grand Aug. 5 will be when Pokémon Go Day at the Zoo will offer game-playing patrons two gyms, more than 20 Pokéstops and dozens of lures set throughout the park and zoo. There will also be a scavenger hunt with prizes for the first 50 trainers, a grand prize Pikachu drawing and, for any one not playing the game, special enrichment feedings for some of the animals with a Pokémon.

Some of you may ask yourself why the park and zoo would be involved with the Pokémon craze.

“Well, mostly, because we can,” said Jean Whalen, assistant parks director and education director. “The Pokémon craze can get people into the park by using something that is popular. Of course, the more people who come into the park, the greater potential for park/zoo donations to increase. But it also increases the potential to reach more people, to send our message and show them all the education opportunities we have here.”

According to Whalen, the education staff consisting of Sarah Cajigas, Holly Frame, Kendra Verity and seasonal educator Nicki Licata realized about year ago there is so much more they could be offering to the community as well as the tourists who visit. They decided to get the word out any way they could. As opposed to just using paper format — flier handouts, posters and such — they are being more environmen-

tally conscious by reaching out through email as well as social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

“A lot of the times, schools reach out to us,” Whalen said. “This coming season I would like to go out and visit more schools. We could do a middle school program and a high school program if the teachers expand their science classes. They know they can get the students’ attention even more if they have a real, live animal in front of them.”

Whalen said the Aquariums Zoos Association (AZA) has such strong, limitless programs for education that allow her and the zoo educators to schedule public information events for interested patrons to learn about conservation, the ecology and the environment. With the zoo being the Cape May County chapter of the American Association for Zoo Keepers (AAZK), Whalen said she believes it is the duty of the education department to make people aware what the zoo offers.

One such way is to have a strong team of docents. The word docent is Latin meaning “to teach.” At the Park and Zoo as well as other zoos, docents are people who are teaching volunteers.

“Our docents, Ann, Peg, Mary and Jim, are great,” Whalen said. “They set up their ‘education station’ with items such as pictures and handouts so they can answer the questions any patron may have as they walk through the zoo. One of their stations is set up by the bison area where people can be educated on the difference between a horn and an antler as well as comparing the difference between bison fur with alpaca fur.”

Besides educating children, Whalen and her team are well aware adults like some education too. This winter, when locals start to feel cabin fever from being cooped up inside, the education department hopes to bring back the adult lectures with Alexander Ernst by working with Atlantic Cape Community College to use one of the school’s lecture halls.

There are also some other ways the educators at the zoo can reach out to people. The summer zoo camp, Crafts with Critters

programs, Littlest Explorers classes and Night Out with the Critters, to name a few. Whalen said she is also aware that some ideas to get people into the zoo come from folks outside the zoo.

On two previous days this summer, yoga classes were taught in the zoo on the “Pathway to Diversity” bridge by the giraffe habitat. As the students find serenity, they make a donation to the care of the zoo animals they are meditating with that morning. The classes came about because instructors approached Whalen about having them out there.

“They came to me and asked why they couldn’t teach yoga in the zoo. Tia Chi, other forms as well,” Whalen said. “We were concerned about how the instructors would be paid since they were not employees of the zoo. But Lisa Chetalo, the first instructor, said she didn’t want to be paid because she would do it as a fundraiser for the zoo. So I cleared with the zoo director and the park director and we got it started. We try to spread it out with different schools of yoga in the area. They also get a chance to provide information about their school or studio. The next one is scheduled for Aug. 27.”

There are many other events and classes scheduled as well as in the works for the zoo. Sometimes it may feel a little overwhelming. But the educators all know how important the zoo is to the community.

“Every time someone discovers I work at the zoo,

‘The Pokemon craze can get people into the park by using something that is popular. Of course, the more people who come into the park, the greater potential for park/zoo donations to increase. But it also increases the potential to reach more people, to send our message and show them all the education opportunities we have here.’

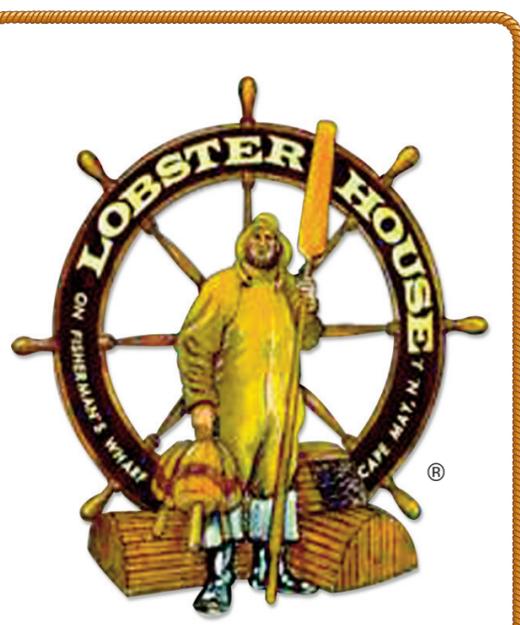
—Jean Whalen, assistant parks director and education director



The summer zoo camp, Crafts with Critters programs, Littlest Explorers classes and Night Out with the Critters are all ways the Cape May County Zoo reaches out to the public to increase exposure.

100 percent of the people tell me how much they love the zoo,” Whalen said. “They can’t believe how well it has grown. Even if I am just walking through the zoo, people will stop me and say what a great thing we’re doing for the county. We have the right staff in place. Now, we just have to keep moving forward.”

The Cape May County Park and Zoo is located at 707 Route 9 North in Cape May Court House. For further information about upcoming events, educational or social, or if you are interested in the educators coming to your school, call (609) 465-5271 or visit cmczoo.com.



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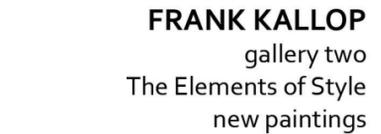
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