

# ZAG NEWS

VOL 2 ISSUE 4

OCTOBER 2004

## ZAG WEEK IN THE SMOKIES NOVEMBER 5-11, 2004

It's here again... ZAG week in the Smokies will take place from Nov 5-11, during this time, hundreds of Zoo and Aquarium gift buyers will be attending the Smoky Mountain Gift Show and also the Gatlinburg Pigeon Forge Resort and Handcrafted Gift Show. The following ZAG activities will take place during this busy week of gift buying in Tennessee.

### Friday November 5

#### **Sponsor Mixer** (buyers welcome!!)

6:30-9:30 PM

Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies

**R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04**

### Sunday November 7

#### **Not for Profit Buyers Meetings**

(NFP buyers only)

4:30-5:30 PM

Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies

**R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04**

### Sunday November 7

#### **ZAG Annual Meeting and Dinner**

5:30-9:30 PM

Cocktails 5:30-6:30 PM

Dinner 6:45-7:30 PM

Discussions/etc. 7:30-9:15 PM

**R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04**

### Monday November 8

#### **Not for Profit Buyers Breakfast**

(NFP buyers only)

7:30-8:30 AM

Continental breakfast

At River Terrace Conference Room

**R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04**

All of the activities listed above are "no charge" to our members, however you must R.S.V.P. in order to attend.

**R.S.V.P. to Judy Jones at:**

[Judith.Edwards@ncmail.net](mailto:Judith.Edwards@ncmail.net) or 336.879.7361.

## **Visit ZAG sponsors' booths And win a Palm Pilot or \$\$**

As an incentive to visit the numerous ZAG sponsors, ZAG buyers will have the opportunity to win one of 18 prizes, listed below:

- 4 Palm Pilots (Deluxe Zire 72/ \$300 value)
- 6 \$50.00 Gift Certificates or cash
- 4 \$100.00 Gift Certificates or cash
- 4 \$150.00 Gift Certificates or cash

Sorry folks, no BINGO or stickers this year! Upon visiting a ZAG sponsor's booth, you will receive a "ZAG ticket", that will be your chance to win one of 18 prizes. After the show all tickets will be sent to ZAG and winners will be notified in early December.

Even if you don't win a prize, most of the sponsors will have show discounts for ZAG members. See insert for products, specials and locations.

## **SMOKY MOUNTAIN SHOW SPECIALS**

Be sure to check out the special insert in this newsletter. The insert lists all the ZAG sponsors that are exhibiting at the Smoky Mountain Gift Show or the Gatlinburg/Pigeon Forge Resort Gift Show, their booth locations, product lines, new products for 2005, and any show specials they are offering. If you are going to these shows, please stop by the ZAG sponsor' booths and check out their product lines.

**For the first time ever, many ZAG sponsors are allowing all ZAG buyers to take advantage of the show specials, even if you can't make it to Gatlinburg!** Unless otherwise stated, all orders using the show specials must be marked "Gatlinburg/Pigeon Forge ZAG Special," and all offers expire 11/30/04.

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR ZAG ANNUAL DINNER

One of the most popular parts of the annual dinner are the roundtable discussions, where we break into smaller groups to discuss topics of interest to merchandise buyers. This year, the six topics will be:

- **Trends: What's hot/what's not.** What items have been strong sellers for you this past season? What items are slowing down in popularity for you?
- **Freight: The Hidden Expense.** Freight costs add significantly to the cost of doing business, and can vary widely from vendor to vendor. Are you paying as much attention to your freight costs as you should? What can we do to better understand and control this expense?
- **Glorious Success: Great Ideas We've Had and Why the World Is a Better Place Because of Them.** Don't be modest! Share your successes, great ideas for products, designs, merchandise displays, carts, etc. If it worked for you, it can work for others, too!
- **Sadder But Wiser: The Mistakes We've Made and the Lessons We've Learned From Them.** We've all made mistakes...errors in judgment, got too excited about a certain merchandise program, etc. Share your "life experiences" and what positive things you've learned from the experience. Maybe your tale of woe will help other buyers avoid the same pitfall!
- **Taboo: Merchandise Categories We Are Forbidden to Sell, and How We Can Sell Them Anyway.** Are there certain kinds of merchandise those people in the Administration Building refuse to let you buy, even though you know it would be a profitable item for your store? Get input from other buyers on how they convinced the powers that be that these items should be sold in our stores.
- **Seeking the Holy Grail: Merchandise We Are Looking For But Can't Find.** Are there products you want to carry in your store but can't find a vendor? Share your wish lists with other buyers. Together, perhaps our combined shopping experience can help you find what you are looking for.

So put on your thinking caps and come prepared to participate! Notepads and pens will be provided so you can capture any pearls of wisdom. For those of you who can't attend the dinner or gift shows, don't worry. All discussions will be summarized in the next ZAG newsletter following the gift show.

*We are looking for people to act as moderators for each discussion topic. Moderators introduce the topic, encourage participation from everyone, keep the discussion on track, and take clear and legible notes. Moderators are not expected to be an expert on their discussion topic, just someone who can get a lively conversation going. We will write up your notes for the ZAG newsletter. If you're interested in helping as a moderator, please contact Dave Albert/Brookfield Zoo at 708-485-0263, ext 685.*

## ZAG 101

*ZAG has changed and expanded a great deal since 2002. Membership has grown from 120 buyers at 80 zoos and aquariums to over 250 buyers from 201 locations, and sponsors have increased from 30 to over 50. Now might be a good time to step back and review ZAG's purpose, history and future.*

**What is ZAG?** The Zoo & Aquarium Buyers Group is a collection of merchandise buyers from zoos, aquariums and other wildlife-related facilities. This can include safari parks, bird sanctuaries, butterfly houses, nature centers, research facilities that are open to the public, and conceivably even wildlife art museums and botanical gardens. In short, it can include any wildlife-oriented facility that has a gift shop.

**What about ZAG's history?** In the late eighties a small group of not-for-profit buyers began meeting at The Smoky Mountain Gift Show. During these informal meetings the attendees shared ideas and discussed numerous buyer related issues that pertained to the zoo and aquarium industry. Year after year these meetings grew in popularity, and by the mid nineties, the annual meetings began drawing nearly a hundred interested buyers and numerous sponsors. Over the years the sponsors have helped in defraying the costs of the yearly meetings, which enables our members to participate without having to pay dues or meeting fees.

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In 2002 the ZAG coordinators began an aggressive campaign to improve our ability to share industry information with our membership. In early 2003 a quarterly newsletter was offered to our members (regardless of their operational status or their professional affiliations.) Through the combination of all of these efforts, by 2004 ZAG had grown to include over 250 memberships and 55 sponsors. Even with this tremendous growth, ZAG continues to be comprised of 70% not-for-profit institutions, 20% for-profit entities, and 10% concessionaires. In 2005 ZAG will hopefully complete the lengthy process of officially becoming incorporated as a non-profit organization.

**What is the purpose of ZAG?** The mission of ZAG is to increase communication between the buyers to help find unique and profitable wildlife-related merchandise, and to share their experiences so that all buyers can make better decisions running their business.

**How does ZAG increase communication between buyers?** ZAG uses five methods to expand networking opportunities and increase communication between buyers:

- The buyers contact list. This is a simple and direct way to contact other buyers when seeking information on products, merchandising, pricing strategies, etc.
- The annual ZAG dinner held each November in Gatlinburg during the Smoky Mountain Gift show.
- The ZAG quarterly newsletter.
- The soon to be released ZAG web site will initially offer basic information to our members and sponsors. The following items will be included in the rollout version of our site: web pages featuring each of our current sponsors with up to date product information and links to their sites; a photo gallery of numerous members' gift shops, kiosks, and merch displays; access to all of our previous newsletters; and other industry related information.
- Regional ZAG meetings. ZAG is working to hold smaller, informal, regional meetings (similar to Gatlinburg) in various parts of the country in association with regional gift shows. Possibilities could include the Seattle or Los Angeles Gift Show, New York City's Toy Fair, the Gathering in Florida, etc.

**What is the role of sponsors in ZAG?** ZAG sponsors are merchandise vendors who pay a \$500 annual fee. This fee is used to pay for the annual dinner, the newsletter printing and postage costs, the game played during the Gatlinburg show to encourage buyers to visit the sponsors' booths, the

web site, regional ZAG meetings, and certain travel expenses for ZAG chair people. In return, ZAG sponsors receive the buyers contact list and extra exposure to buyers through the newsletter and the Gatlinburg/Pigeon Forge gift shows. Sponsors do not have any editorial control over content of the newsletter or web site.

**Why do we have for profit facilities and concessionaires as members in ZAG?** Currently buyers for non-profit facilities represent about 70% of ZAG's membership, for-profit facilities buyers represent about 20% and concessionaires about 10%. When ZAG originally started it was open to primarily AZA-accredited, non-profit institutions. When new leadership came on board in 2002, it was decided to open ZAG to all wildlife-related facilities for several reasons:

- Bottom line, all the buyers, whether for-profit or non-profit, are trying to achieve the same thing: to find unique and profitable wildlife items for their gift shops.
- In most cases, we do not "compete" with each other, even when several facilities are located in the same area, and guest who visit both facilities are unlikely to comparison shop between the stores.
- If any buyer feels uncomfortable sharing financial information in a discussion, they can simply choose not to participate in that discussion.
- Talking openly and professionally about such things as cost of goods, mark ups, shrinkage and freight costs will help independent buyers manage their business better, and may help prevent them from being "taken over" by outside companies.

**What is the future of ZAG?** We will continue to provide timely information to all of our buyers and sponsors through various forms of communication (newsletters, e-mail, web site, regional forums, etc.). ZAG will also work to expand our membership base by inviting more zoos, aquariums and other wildlife attractions to join. We will also continue to be mindful of our sponsors' needs in terms of delivering access to the buyers in return for their sponsorship.

### **ATTENTION SPONSORS**

During our Annual Dinner Meeting we have numerous tables set up with our sponsors' merchandise. If you would like to loan several of your products for us to display, please contact Dave Albert for details.

## **ZAG INTERVIEW: ROGER WILLIAMS ZOO**

*Recently, ZAG spoke with Sandie Franco, Director of Retail Operations for the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island. Here's what is going on over there.*

### **Describe your zoo/aquarium (acreage, annual attendance, major exhibits, key animals, etc.)**

Roger Williams Park Zoo is located on 40 acres with an annual attendance of 700,000. Our major exhibits are polar bears, snow leopards, elephants and giraffes.

### **Describe your merchandise operations (number of shops, square footage of each, annual sales, number and location of seasonal shops/carts, etc.)**

The A to Zebra Gift Shop is 4000 sq.ft; this is our main gift shop and open year-round (Editor's Note...this shop is located in the middle of the zoo). Nature's Inspirations is a 400 sq. ft. shop, which is dedicated to selling products that are environmentally friendly.

### **List some of your best-selling items/categories (if possible, be specific, use descriptions, name vendors, give examples of colors, animals, etc.)**

Plush snakes from K&M are still doing very well this season. Rep Pals from Darnos have also been a very strong seller. Misting fans from Charles Products have helped keep all the visitors cool during their stay.

**Are any items/categories trending downward in popularity?** Some of our name programs have seen a slight decrease in sales. Sad to say, but hanging monkeys have decreased in sales along with small floppy plush.

**What merchandise are you looking for that you can't find?** We are currently looking for hats made out of a recycled material to put in our environmentally friendly store. We have found some good vendors who sell garments, but we still can't find any hats.

**What trends are you seeing in 2004?** Knit hats sold all season, they are not just a winter item anymore.

**Do you have any merchandise projects that are unique to your zoo (for example, photo ops, special sale events, school bags, web site/catalog sales, off-site shops, gift cards, etc.)?** We implemented a web site this year in hopes of increasing sales, however we find that it just isn't working for us. We will be taking the web page down and continue advertising on our zoo's web site that we do mail orders.

We also have turned our smaller seasonal store into a more natural environment. The products sold in this store must meet certain requirements: they must be either educational, made from recycled products, or can be recycled in the future.

**The Roger Williams Zoo gift shops are run by a concessionaire, Aramark. How does that arrangement work? As the Director of Retail Operations, what items do you get to choose for the shops, and what gets sent automatically from Aramark? How do you both decide how much space to give each category? Who sets prices? Things like that...** As the Director of Retail Operations I choose everything for the shop. Aramark does not do corporate purchasing; they understand that every location is unique and decisions about merchandise should be made on-site. I also work very closely with the folks here at the Zoo: from the zoo director to the zookeepers, we often discuss what type of merchandise should be sold to reflect the Zoo's mission. We believe in carrying merchandise that is realistic in nature. We do not carry items such as animals wearing any type of clothing or depicted in any way other than natural. I set prices, I generally use a specific mark up and we often use perceived value. I have often said that Aramark may be paying me, but I work for the best interest of my zoo. All retail decisions are based on what will benefit the zoo.

## **For ZAG information**

### **Dave Albert**

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### **Steve Fairchild**

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## **SPONSOR MIXER**

**Friday 6:30 -9:30 pm**

**Ripley's Aquarium of Smokies**

**\*\*Buyers Welcome!!\*\***

