

# ZAG NEWS

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## CONSERVATION COMMERCE

*Terry Blumer, ZooStore Manager for the Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle, Washington participated in a session on “conservation commerce” at the Chicago AZA conference in September 2005. We asked Terry to provide some information on this subject.*

Lets face it – what do Americans do well? We consume. Often we as retail managers are chided for our perceived role as perpetuating rampant consumption instead of championing our institutional conservation goals. At times it may seem that we get negative feedback from both sides - our customers and our co-workers. But does commerce really have to be an anathema to conservation? I don't think so. At Woodland Park Zoo I have been working to wed the two concepts in my customers and my coworkers minds by naming my objective “Conservation Commerce” (C.C.).

If your customers are anything like ours, most do not view the gift shop as an integral part of the zoo's (or aquarium's) mission. It is simply a place to validate the visitor's experience and maybe, just maybe, they might connect their purchase dollars with raising revenue for the institution.

A well-managed gift shop is both a revenue center and an extension of your institutions

mission – conveying a strong commitment to conservation to your visitors. By strengthening the message that money raised helps conservation, the store enhances the visitor experience and sends the guest off with a much more fully integrated experience connecting them to the institution's mission. Offering products which support social, ecological and/or environmental conservation creates the opportunity for a personal call to action and provides the visitor with a way to make a difference that very moment. And who doesn't like instant gratification these days?

So what exactly constitutes Conservation Commerce? I believe it is open to a fairly wide interpretation and that it should reflect the personality of each individual institution. For example, if your institutional goal is to save the world's oceans, you would look for products that are ocean friendly and sustainable. Needless to say, the theme of the merchandise would generally have a nautical slant, however it would not necessarily exclude land-based sensibilities. (The Shedd's woven household goods from the Philippines come to mind). Simply put, an item that supports a cause through the purchase be it wholesale or retail does double duty – providing direct funds (via the wholesaler) to a designated organization and also providing direct funds (via your visitor's purchase) to your institution's causes. In essence, the customer gets a double score because they choose to buy a socially responsible item.

Over the course of six years, Woodland Park Zoo's ZooStore has increased the percentage of inventory that falls under our C.C. definition from 2% to 11%. Sales have grown from 5% to 13% of total gross sales. Almost all product categories have some form of C.C. product in them and we reinforce the messaging via merchandising stories, photos and text from the organizations involved and banners of our own principle conservation projects. Integrating this concept with our exhibits, education and our publications teams has led to multiple forms of messaging both on grounds and off. Recently, a "conservation talker" position was created for our docents. This allows them to suggest ways of direct conservation impact such as purchasing a C.C. item at the ZooStore. The introduction of this one-on-one conversation with the visitor helped drive a surge in sales of goods from the Snow Leopard Trust, almost doubling the gross sales of the prior year!

As retailers, we are numbers driven and forever focused on maximizing profits. Conservation Commerce does require a repositioning of this focus as some (but not all) C.C. programs will have slower turns and/or lower profit margins than we are accustomed to delivering. As more of us promote cause-oriented merchandise, the more likely costs will stabilize and profitability will follow. For many, it may represent a major departure in the flavor and theme of your store. It will also take time to take root and grow with your customer base.

In the end is it worth it? I believe so. As professionals in our field, we owe it to ourselves (and our institutions) to stretch and evolve and take calculated risks. We have a unique opportunity to take the lead within our industry and align ourselves more solidly with our institutional goals, partner with the manufacturing world to influence and change things and ultimately make a difference in this world.

**Below is a list of vendors that Terry provided which he feels carry conservation commerce merchandise. ZAG sponsors are in bold.**

Boku Books  
 Courage Trading Company  
 Eco-Brazil  
 K&M/Wild Republic  
 La Vida Verde  
**Mr. Ellie Pooh (ZAG sponsor)**  
 Mudlark  
 Mulberry Neckware  
 PlanetZoo  
 San Segal  
 Snow Leopard Enterprises  
 Tortoise Care International  
**Wildlife Artists (ZAG sponsor)**

The following ZAG sponsors, not included in Terry's list, also offer what could be considered conservation commerce merchandise:

**Global Mamas/Women in Progress**  
**Great Elephant Poo Poo Paper Company**  
 Please refer to your 2006 ZAG Sponsor list, included in this newsletter, for contact information on these vendors.

### **A ZAG chat line in the works**

In our continuing effort to increase networking among our buyers, tentative plans are underway to develop a "ZAG chat line". Introducing, implementing and monitoring such a feature on our website will require a certain amount of time and support by a number of our members. As we proceed in the planning stage of this project, your input will be much appreciated. Let us know what you think...

*Yea, Nay, or Good luck!*

Contact Bill Lucey

[Rainforest24@juno.com](mailto:Rainforest24@juno.com)

## NEW MEMBERS

Please welcome the following new member institutions to ZAG!

British Columbia Wildlife Park,  
Kamloops, BC  
Bramble Park Zoo, Watertown, SD  
The Butterfly House, Whitehouse, OH  
Chattanooga Zoo, Chattanooga, TN  
Cherry Brook Zoo, Saint John, NB  
Kalamazoo Nature Center, Kalamazoo, MI  
Lehigh Valley Zoo, Schnecksville, PA  
Loggerhead Marinelife Center,  
Juno Beach, FL  
Micke Grove Zoo, Lodi, CA  
Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington, IL  
Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch,  
San Antonio, TX  
Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education,  
Pisgah Forest, NC  
Tybee Island Marine Science Center,  
Tybee Island, GA  
Please refer to the updated 2006 ZAG members list for contact information on these and all ZAG members. *Please contact Marla Molinelli/Lincoln Park Zoo to update any information in your listing.*

## NEW SPONSORS

Please welcome the following new sponsors to ZAG!

Earth Creations  
Great Elephant Poo Poo Paper Company  
Heritage Playing Card Company  
The Orb Factory  
Peabody's Toys That Teach  
The Talking Storybook Company  
Time Out Apparel  
United Souvenirs & Apparel  
Wild Adventures/Rhode Island Novelty Company

ZAG sponsors support activities such as the newsletter, web site, and the regional and annual meetings. Be sure to check out their product lines! Please refer to the updated 2006 ZAG sponsors list included in this newsletter for contact information on these and returning ZAG sponsors. *(Sponsors, please contact Dave Albert/Brookfield Zoo if you need to update the information in your listing.)*

## ZAG

### STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Ann Massey** Sponsor Membership Committee member  
[amassey@chaffeezoo.org](mailto:amassey@chaffeezoo.org) 805-461-7602

**Bill Lucey** Website coordinator  
[Rainforest24@juno.com](mailto:Rainforest24@juno.com) 865-428-4091

**Brent Walter** Treasurer  
[hvzconcessions@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hvzconcessions@sbcglobal.net) 608-266-4594

**Dave Albert** Sponsorship Committee coordinator  
[daalbert@brookfieldzoo.org](mailto:daalbert@brookfieldzoo.org) 708-485-0263, ext 685

**Marla Molinelli** Buyer Committee coordinator  
[mmolinelli@lpzoo.org](mailto:mmolinelli@lpzoo.org) 312-742-2260

**Mary Jane Brown** Buyer Membership Committee member  
[mjbrown@akronzoo.org](mailto:mjbrown@akronzoo.org) 330-375-2550, ext 7244

**Steve Fairchild** ZAG Inc. Coordinator  
[sfairchild@scz.org](mailto:sfairchild@scz.org) 316-266-8225

**ZAG IS EVERYWHERE** (almost!)

*Over 200 institutions are represented throughout the United States and Canada.*

*Here is how they are distributed throughout the country.*

**U.S.**

Alabama - 1	Louisiana -4	Pennsylvania -6
Alaska - 4	Maine -1	Rhode Island -1
Arizona- 2	Maryland -3	South Carolina - 4
Arkansas -1	Massachusetts - 6	South Dakota - 5
California -19	Michigan -7	Tennessee- 8
Colorado - 3	Minnesota -7	Texas -7
Connecticut - 1	Mississippi - 3	Utah -2
Delaware - 1	Missouri - 7	Virginia -6
District of Columbia -1	Montana - 2	Washington -5
Florida - 19	Nebraska - 2	West Virginia -1
Georgia - 3	Nevada - 1	Wisconsin -5
Hawaii - 4	New Jersey -2	<b><u>Canada</u></b>
Idaho -2	New Mexico -1	Alberta -1
Illinois - 6	New York -8	British Columbia - 3
Indiana - 5	North Carolina -4	Manitoba -1
Iowa - 2	North Dakota - 3	Ontario -5
Kansas - 6	Ohio - 5	Quebec -2
Kentucky - 3	Oklahoma -3	Grand Cayman Islands -2
	Oregon - 2	<b><u>Bahamas - 1</u></b>

Please contact Steve Fairchild for a detailed listing of institutions by state.

# ZAG NEWSLETTER INTERVIEW

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### CLYDE PEELING'S REPTILAND ALLENWOOD, PENNSYLVANIA

Recently we spoke with Chris Bergesen-Peeling, the buyer for Clyde Peeling's Reptiland in Allenwood, Pennsylvania. Here is what Chris had to say about Reptiland:

#### **Please describe your facility...acreage, annual attendance, major exhibits, most popular animals, etc.**

Reptiland is a small, private zoo for exotic reptiles and amphibians. Our 10-acre facility includes public exhibits, food service, retail, and an exhibit fabrication workshop. We operate year-round and have a newly renovated 9,000 square foot indoor exhibit gallery with about 50 species on display. Our niche is bringing visitors in contact with animals. Being small allows us to get one on one with most visitors. Everyone gets an opportunity to touch a snake and alligator and talk with one of our zookeepers. The animals that generate the most excitement are the giant tortoises, snake-necked turtles, and colorful poison dart frogs.

#### **Please describe your merchandise operations...number of year-round shops, seasonal shops, square footage, seasonal carts, etc.**

We have an 800 square foot gift shop in our front entrance building. Although our retail space is small, I maximize its impact by filling every space with as much diversity as possible. I buy many lines of merchandise, at or near the minimum orders. And I re-order frequently. This allows me

to offer a great selection and keep things fresh. We use about 75 vendors, and merchandise ranges from \$.35 stretchies to African masks and carvings up to \$200.00.

#### **List some of your best-selling merchandise items and categories.**

Stretchies from K&M International/Wild Republic do very well for us, especially the frog stretchies that sell for \$1.00. K&M's frog and crocodile pinchers and assorted rubber snakes are always a sure thing. Kids' shirts are quite popular. I have doubled my sales in the last several years by offering a wider selection of youth designs and by hanging them. Stephen Joseph, Wild Cotton and Anipals have a great selection of dinosaur and reptile themed youth shirts at great prices. Small, assorted rocks are always very popular with kids, especially during school group season. We also sell a lot of the break your own geodes, agate geodes and agate slabs from GeoCentral and Bartky Minerology. A popular gift item from K&M Imports is the line of metal geckos that hang on the wall. They are inexpensive at \$11.00, and very colorful. Fiesta's plush dog and cat purses have been a great product this past year. I had to reorder several times throughout the year. National Design is a great source for pencils, pens and mugs. They offer great pricing and the best minimums I've found.

#### **Are any items or categories trending downward in popularity?**

I think the hanging monkeys are losing their appeal. You see them everywhere now...not just at zoos and nature themed stores. I am also seeing less interest in the molded resin picture.

**What merchandise are you looking for that you can't find?**

I currently do not carry any shot glasses, but I do get requests for them. I want something a little different. I am looking for a shot glass with a 3-dimensional poison dart frog on the rim.

**What trends are you seeing in 2006?**

What I have noticed is more color and texture in next year's lines. K&M/Wild Republic's new line of trucks and pinchers has eye-popping color and they are also offering more color choices in their plush lines. Stephen Joseph seems to be carrying that trend as well with their new colorful puff tee shirt designs.

**Will there be any new shops, carts, or attractions at Reptiland in 2006?**

We are planning a new venomous reptile show to augment our daily programs, and hope to add an Australian event to improve our special events calendar for 2006. Our five-year plan includes a new, larger entrance building and gift shop.

**Do you have any special merchandise projects that are unique to your facility? For example, photo opportunities, special sale events, school bags, web site/catalog sales, gift cards, off-site shops, etc. How are these operations run, and have they been successful for you?**

We have quite a few school groups that shop as part of their field trip experience. Some opt to receive a list of merchandise to send home. We fill the orders prior to their visit, and place the correct change in each bag. One school even buys souvenirs for each of the kids and the teacher and I work together to find the appropriate selection

Over the past three years, ZAG has worked diligently to increase the networking opportunities for our hundreds of buyers. These opportunities include a ZAG web site, quarterly newsletter, and additional meetings during the annual ZAG Week. In 2004, ZAG coordinators introduced a one-day regional meeting format for our buyers who aren't able to attend the annual networking meetings in the Smokies. So far this year the ZAG coordinators have scheduled early spring regional networking meetings in the San Francisco area, Chicago and Kansas City. Plans are now under way for more regional sessions for the middle summer or fall. The one-day sessions are developed and coordinated by acting Board members and volunteers, thus providing a "turnkey" operation for the host facility. The cost of meeting rooms, snacks, lunch, miscellaneous supplies and facility tours are all covered by ZAG Inc. Meetings typically begin in the late morning (to accommodate those who drive a considerable distance), and conclude with a facility tour at the end of the workday. Participation may range from five to fifty, depending on the proximity of ZAG institutions in your area. So there you go. Let us bring face-to-face networking opportunities to your facility. Contact Steve Fairchild or Dave Albert for additional details.

In the next issue of  
**ZAG News.....**

- Explanation of the proposed Bylaws, process for ratification, and framework for the election of officers and board members
- Recap of the annual meeting's round table discussions.
- And more!

**Host a ZAG networking Session**

