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Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo Announces Dedicated Director Gregg Dancho to Retire After Almost 45 Years; Dr. Jim Wharton to Take Helm as New CEO

Bridgeport, CT – (July 22, 2024) – Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo is announcing the retirement of Gregg Dancho, who has devoted more than 45 years to the Zoo. Under Dancho's visionary guidance, the Zoo has become a beloved community gem and a leader in conservation and education. Jim Wharton will assume the role of CEO on September 3rd, 2024.

Gregg Dancho's tenure at Beardsley Zoo has been marked by numerous achievements and milestones. His dedication and passion for wildlife have transformed the Zoo into a premier destination, fostering a connection between the public, animals and our environment. Among his many accomplishments, Dancho spearheaded multiple conservation initiatives, expanded educational programs, and oversaw significant renovations and expansions of the Zoo's facilities, and achieved the first AZA accreditation.

"For nearly 45 years, the Zoo has been my life and passion. The animals, children, and guests have all become an extension of my family, bringing me immense joy and pride. While it's time for the Zoo to look towards the next century, I plan to stay involved as Director Emeritus, which will also allow me to spend more time with my family and grandkids," Dancho stated. "I am grateful to the staff, volunteers, sponsors, and community members who have supported our mission and shared our successes. I am confident that the Zoo is in excellent hands with our new CEO, Jim Wharton."

Board Chair of Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo, Bob Natt had the following to say, "We are all immensely thankful for Gregg Dancho's extraordinary dedication spanning nearly 45 years, which has transformed Beardsley Zoo into the esteemed destination it is today. His passion for the zoo, wildlife conservation and steadfast commitment have left an enduring legacy. As we welcome Jim Wharton as our new CEO, we are confident that his leadership and vision will build upon Gregg's achievements, further enhancing the zoo's impact and inspiring future generations."

Dr. Jim Wharton, formerly Vice President of Conservation Engagement and Learning at the Seattle Aquarium, takes on the position of CEO on September 3rd. With extensive experience, Wharton brings a wealth of knowledge and a fresh perspective, committed to upholding the Zoo's legacy of excellence. He led public engagement across galleries, schools, and community programs at the Aquarium, and played a key role in advancing its equity efforts as co-chair of the DEI Council during the strategic planning phase. Collaborating with partners, Jim and his team promoted empathy for conservation outcomes. He also advised AZA's PACT initiative, advocating for enhanced social science and stakeholder involvement in conservation planning, and contributed as an instructor and accreditation inspector in AZA's professional school.

“I am honored to join Connecticut’s Beardsley Zoo and build upon the incredible foundation laid by Gregg Dancho.” said Dr. Jim Wharton. “I look forward to working with the dedicated team here to scale up our conservation, education, and community programs.”

Wharton’s appointment follows a rigorous national search led by the Zoo’s Board of Directors, who were impressed by his vision and proven track record in leadership. As the new CEO, Dr. Wharton aims to enhance visitor experiences, strengthen conservation efforts, and expand the Zoo’s educational outreach.

We look forward to new beginnings under the leadership of Dr. Jim Wharton as Connecticut’s Beardsley Zoo continues to inspire future generations of conservationists and animal lovers.

For more information about Connecticut’s Beardsley Zoo and upcoming events [click here](#).

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