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San Antonio Zoo Adds Senior Leader With International Experience To Team *Jesse Vargas joins San Antonio Zoological Society as Vice President Education & Facilities*

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS – San Antonio Zoological Society is pleased to announce that Jesse Vargas has joined the team as Vice President, Education & Facilities. Vargas will report to Charles Claville, Deputy Director, and will manage the day to day operations and all aspects of Education, Will Smith Zoo School, Maintenance (Facilities, Special Events Team, and Zoo Projects Team) as well as the Capital Projects Team.

"We're thrilled to have Jesse join our team, especially with his strong international zoological, educational, and development experience," said San Antonio Zoo president & CEO, Tim Morrow. "San Antonio Zoo is poised for great growth and expansion. Jesse's well-rounded background, including leading large scale capital projects, will surely prove to be a great asset to the zoo and our city."

Jesse comes to the zoo with more than 25 years of park management experience, having started right here in San Antonio as a seasonal Goodwill Ambassador at Fiesta Texas while earning his Bachelor of Business Management from UTSA.

After spending his first 14 years working with Six Flags (TX, OH, KY, and CA) in various progressive capacities, Jesse was appointed San Francisco Zoo's Chief Operating Officer. There, he coordinated the finalization and implementation of their 250m master plan and carried out 38 refurbishment and new construction projects inclusive of Hearst Grizzly Gulch, the largest grizzly bear exhibit in the lower 48 states.

Following his time in San Francisco, Jesse moved overseas and, over a 12-year period, led teams responsible for opening, expanding, or operating innovative parks and educational attractions in the Bahamas and the Middle East. Notable achievements during this time include guiding Ferrari World Abu Dhabi through 5 years of consecutive record growth to include implementing a \$650m master plan expansion. Jesse also spearheaded the opening of the world's first STEM-based, experiential learning and entertainment facility. This attraction utilized innovative mediums to showcase teachings ranging from paleontological biomechanics to interstellar physics.

Vargas spent two years as the Assistant Director, Parks & Recreation for the City of Austin, supporting hundreds of recreational areas to include parks, recreational facilities, and programming.

Jesse's most recent assignment was as Vice-President at Atlantis Dubai. He was responsible for the resort's three world-class animal attractions: Lost Chambers Aquarium, Sea Lion Point, and Dolphin Bay. While in this role, his team achieved AZA accreditation, the first facility in the Middle East and North Africa to have done so.

Jesse also established a Conservation & Education Department and campus-wide sustainability program.

"I am excited to join the San Antonio Zoo family!" Vargas said. "To quote Cousteau, '*People protect what they love*'...simply put, this is my 'why.' Through our exhibits, programming and facilities, I want our guests to love our animals, our people, our school, and our zoo as much as we do and, in turn, actively support our conservation efforts here in San Antonio, and beyond." Jesse further shared that returning to his hometown and making a meaningful contribution to its culture and success has been a long-standing dream of his.

About San Antonio Zoological Society

San Antonio Zoological Society was established in 1929 and is a non-profit organization committed to securing a future for wildlife. The society operates San Antonio Zoo, Will Smith Zoo School, Edutainment, Center for Conservation and Research at San Antonio Zoo, and Kiddie Park.

Website www.sazoo.org

About San Antonio Zoo

San Antonio Zoo®, operated by San Antonio Zoological Society is a non-profit organization committed to securing a future for wildlife. Through its passion and expertise in animal care, conservation, and education, the zoo's mission is to inspire its community to love, engage with, act for and protect animals and the places they live. The zoo welcomes more than a million visitors each year and is open year-round. San Antonio Zoo operates the largest nature based preschool in the country, Will Smith Zoo School, the Center for Conservation and Research, and Kiddie Park. San Antonio Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Zoological Association of America, and Humane Certified by American Humane.

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