

May 4, 2007

JMF sponsors 150 third graders to attend overnight experience at the Wild Animal Park

Twenty years after third-grader Jarrett Meeker's tragic death, his foundation received a grant proposal from teachers at Central Elementary School, a low socio-economic school in San Diego, asking for help in sending their third graders to the Night Owls overnight program at the Wild Animal Park. Ironically, the program was set for the end of April, exactly 20 years after Keith and Judy Meeker lost 8-year-old Jarrett.



The students eagerly listened to Dr. Zoolittle's animal presentation while sipping hot chocolate.

With JMF celebrating its 20th anniversary, JMF agreed to support Central's program and sponsored the nearly 150 third graders who wished to attend. As part of the Night Owls program, the kids met a variety of endangered animals up-close, took a private Journey into Africa tour, participated in games and campfire stories, and spent one night at the Park, where a lion's booming roar could be heard at all hours of the night.

“With JMF's contribution, all of our third graders were able to build upon the classroom curriculum through the Night Owls experience,” said Sarah Mathy, one of Central's third grade teachers, whose students have been lifted to new heights since participating in the program. “One group of girls in particular was so eager to start a conservation plan after the first day that they stayed up past lights-out to list all the things they could do to help the environment. The experience gave the students a new way of thinking; they realized little kids can make a big change and that makes it more special for the teachers and parents who are now watching their projects come alive.”

JMF board members Jon Meeker, Will Weisman and Rene Abarca volunteered to assist the teachers on the field trip as chaperones. Their participation enabled JMF to witness firsthand how the educational program affected the students.



As chaperones on the trip, a few JMF board members were able to observe as the excited third-graders learned about wildlife.