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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**DOHMEN FAMILY FOUNDATION HIPPO HAVEN NOW OPEN
AT THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY ZOO**

MILWAUKEE, WI--The Milwaukee County Zoo is excited to announce that its new Dohmen Family Foundation Hippo Haven is now open to visitors.

The new exhibit is home to the Zoo's two hippopotamus—39-year-old male, Happy, and 50-year-old female, Patti. It will allow visitors an up-close experience with the resident hippos, while the animals benefit from a larger and cleaner habitat, due to a new, state-of-the-art filtration system. The 60,000-gallon underwater viewing tank is the centerpiece of the exhibit, offering an inspiring and unique perspective of these magnificent, powerful animals. The Zoo is now one of 12 zoos in the country to offer an underwater hippo viewing experience.

“Even though the Zoo was closed in March due to the COVID-19 health emergency, hippo construction continued as an essential service during the “Safer at Home” directive,” said Zoo Director Chuck Wikenhauser. “We are so thankful progress could continue during the closure and we know the opening will serve as a huge “Welcome Back” to visitors who have waited patiently for the Zoo to reopen safely. We’re truly a “haven” for animals and visitors!”

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Hippo Haven 2020 / Add one

The pool, or watering hole, has varied depths, and reaches 7-feet at the deepest, and includes two entrances for the animals, sloped rocks and ramps, a resting platform and even a water cannon for keepers to use as an enrichment option. Enrichment allows animals to display natural behaviors and make choices within their environment. The watering hole will simulate a natural habitat, as hippos often push off objects to move in the water.

Hippos spend approximately 16 hours a day underwater, so in the past, visitors may have only caught a glimpse of the top of the hippos' heads or a portion of their rumps. The new underwater viewing tank, with 3-inch thick glass spanning 85 feet in length, provides visitors more opportunities to see more of the hippos and their behaviors.

In order to give visitors a clear look at the animals, much detail and thought was put into the design of the filtration system for the pool. Hippo Haven uses the same ozone filtration process installed in the Zoo's Otter Passage habitat.

Not only will this filtration system provide a healthier environment for the hippos, it will save approximately 20 million gallons of water each year, filtering and reusing the same water for the entire season. The exhibit will be open seasonally, from April through October.

Because hippos defecate in water, filtration is an intricate three-step process. The first separates the waste, presses out the liquid, and forms a solid that is composted off-site into high quality, nutrient-rich organic soil. The remaining two steps in the process uses five filters for the smaller waste and then disinfects the water with ozone – a safer option than chlorine.

The 3,500-square-foot beach area features several different sand surfaces, giving the hippos the choice of where they'd like to lie.

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Hippo Haven/Add two

The beach includes varied propping items such as anchored artificial logs. Although wild hippos spend most of their days in the water to stay cool, they do venture on land to sunbathe and feed. The beach area closely resembles a hippo habitat in the wild, where the animals can be found in sub-Saharan Africa, near lakes, swamps and slow-moving rivers.

The exhibit features several educational and interactive areas that will remain closed until later phases of the Zoo's reopening. Areas include:

“Splatter Zone” -- simulating a hippo spraying poop, adding nutrients to the water

“Open Wide”-- showing the unique characteristics of a hippo's mouth

“Bloat” -- educating visitors on the definition of a hippo bloat

“Hippo Skull”-- displaying authentic skull (encased) focusing on the teeth and tusks

Two custom-made fiberglass hippo sculptures, replicating the Zoo's hippos, are also featured in the interactive area. Specially designed and constructed for photo opportunities and as play structures, the mother hippo weights 4,593 pounds, while the “baby” weighs 1,330 pounds.

The \$13.5 million Hippo Haven project was made possible with donations from the Zoological Society of Milwaukee, and from Milwaukee County on behalf of the Milwaukee County Zoo. Hippo Haven is Phase II of the Zoo's Adventure Africa project; Phase I – the Elephant Exhibit opened in May 2019.

Visit the Zoo's website at www.milwaukeezoo.org for advance reservation details for visiting during Phase 2 of reopening. Daily attendance is limited, to adhere to physical distancing guidelines and the health and safety of visitors, staff and animals. The Zoo is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. during Phase 2; the last entry reservation is at 1:30 p.m. For more information, contact the Marketing and Communications Department: 414.256.5466.