

Press Release

Local Rotary Clubs to Transform Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo

The Rotary Clubs of Gainesville Foundation will provide the majority of the funding to create an Elevated Treehouse System and Learning Center at the Teaching Zoo located within Santa Fe College.

Gainesville, FL, September 11, 2025: The Rotary Clubs of Gainesville Foundation Inc., at its September 10, 2025, Board of Directors meeting, listened with growing excitement to the plans presented by Director of the Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo, Mr. Jonathan Miot, for jump starting improvements at the zoo. Jonathan outlined the opportunity for the local Rotary clubs to partner with the zoo in a meaningful way to create a new space for learning, engaging, and enriching visitors, both young and old.

This project was introduced to the Board of Directors by two senior members of the Rotary Club of Gainesville as a potential collaboration with the Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo. The idea was initially identified during a site plan review in 2024 at a regular Rotary lunch meeting. After 18 months of discussions and planning between both organizations, the project was officially presented to the Board for consideration of funding through the 2026 Wild Game Feast grant.

“We are excited to be awarding the Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo a grant to provide more than \$300,000 through our Foundation and our 2026 Wild Game Feast to build an Elevated Treehouse System and Learning Center within the zoo. This introduces a new perspective to the visitor experience – viewing the exhibits from an elevation, providing unique outdoor educational spaces, and creating an immersive multi-level play structure with plenty of self-guided play. This is merely phase one of the reimaging of the zoo; we cannot wait to see this built, and what comes next for the zoo.” – Guy Jopling, Feast Master 2026.

The Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo is the only zoo on a college campus accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Covering 10-acres, the zoo is home to over 70 different species of animals and is maintained by around 100 students enrolled in the college’s Zoo Animal Technology program. Jonathan Miot, Director of the Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo, said upon hearing the news of the funding and partnership, “this will move our special space much closer towards our goal of becoming a zoological leader in creating active, immersive, and global learning opportunities for all. We are thrilled the Rotary Clubs of Gainesville see our vision and will be part of our journey.”

For more information on this and other projects funded by The Rotary Clubs of Gainesville Foundation, contact Rotarian Wesley Eubank, info@rotarygainesville.org.

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ABOUT THE ROTARY CLUBS OF GAINESVILLE FOUNDATION

The Rotary Clubs of Gainesville Foundation (a registered 501(c)(3) charity) comprises of representatives from the four Rotary Clubs in Gainesville, Florida: the Rotary Club of Gainesville, the Rotary Club of Downtown Gainesville, the Rotary Club of Greater Gainesville, and the Rotary Club of Gainesville Sunrise. The Foundation formed in 1987 to manage the funds generated through the annual funding raising events held at Hatchet Creek (4841 NE 118th Drive, Gainesville, FL 32641-2732) as well as the funds generated through the Foundation Fryers catering organization. The first Rotary Project funded by the monies raised was the L.H Rogers Scholarship House, located at 2120 SW 16th Street, Gainesville, Florida 32601 and has to date raised over \$3.5 million for local Rotary projects, charities, and student scholarships.