



County of Onondaga
Office of the County Executive

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County Executive Ryan McMahon Unveils New Exhibit at Rosamond Gifford Zoo

50 new moon jellyfish join the family

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon today unveiled a new exhibit funded by the Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo – aquariums housing 50 moon jellyfish!

The Friends of the Zoo raised \$20,000 to purchase two 100-gallon tanks, each holding 25 moon jellies -- translucent sea creatures with short, fringy tentacles – lit with blue filters that show off their unique structure. The exhibit represents a new, first-time species for the zoo. It is located near the zoo's other marine exhibits in the USS Antiquities cave.

County Executive McMahon said, "This new exhibit funded by the Friends of the Zoo and installed by the county is an example of our great partnership with the Friends. I would like to thank Friends President Janet Agostini and all of the Friends supporters for helping us continue to improve and enhance our world-class zoo."

Zoo Director Ted Fox said the jellyfish exhibit will be a great addition and support the zoo's mission of conservation education. "Not only are jellyfish an iconic and popular species, they are indicators of the health of our oceans, so they give us added opportunities to talk about things like climate change and plastics pollution," he said.

After months of work to install the tanks and infrastructure for water filtration and cycling, temperature control and lighting, the jellyfish arrived about two weeks ago. The windows to the tanks were covered while the animals acclimated.

County Executive McMahon oversaw their official unveiling today with a countdown to cue aquarium staff to pull the curtain and reveal the swarms of jellies.

Jellyfish are invertebrates that use a form of jet propulsion to move through the water. They are famous – and feared -- for their stinging cells, which they use to stun prey. However, moon jellies eat plankton and are the least dangerous jellyfish to humans.

Fox said jellyfish are a sort of “canary in the coal mine” for ocean health – except they indicate a problem by multiplying rather than declining. In recent years, as threats like pollution, ocean warming and overfishing have depleted the numbers of their predators, jellyfish populations have exploded in some areas.

Jellyfish are the oldest multi-organ animal, with fossil evidence indicating they existed over 500 million years ago. They have been studied widely by scientists, and moon jellies even went into space as an experiment aboard the Space Shuttle Challenger in 1991.

Moon jellies are relatives of another invertebrate species, upside-down jellyfish, that can be found in the Garden Eel tank at the zoo.

The Rosamond Gifford Zoo is Syracuse’s accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the gold standard for animal care, wildlife conservation and guest experience. Visit the zoo’s website at www.rosamondgiffordzoo.org and the Friends of the Zoo events site at www.syracusezooevents.org.

The Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo is the non-profit organization that supports the zoo and its conservation missions. Learn more about the Friends at www.syracusezooevents.org/our-story.

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