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BROOKFIELD ZOO, CHICAGO

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Global conservation leaders honored by Brookfield Zoo Chicago at 22nd annual conservation leadership awards dinner

Brookfield, IL—Brookfield Zoo Chicago presented four coveted conservation awards during the 22nd annual Conservation Leadership Awards Dinner. Held at the Four Seasons Hotel on October 7, the evening raised more than \$370,000 while honoring the people and organizations that embody its mission to inspire conservation leadership by connecting people to wildlife and nature.

Established in 2005 by the Zoo's Board of Trustees, the Conservation Leadership Awards honor the lifelong legacy of George Rabb, Ph.D., president emeritus of Brookfield Zoo Chicago. His vision and leadership helped define the Zoo's global conservation impact and continue to inspire new generations of advocates and changemakers.

"Each year, these awards give us the chance to come together to celebrate our partners in conservation—the dedicated scientists, educators and supporters who share our commitment to wildlife and nature," said Kate Brueggemann, senior vice president of development at Brookfield Zoo Chicago. "Their contributions and

impact are a reminder that together, we can build a future where wildlife and people thrive side by side.”

Emmy Award-winning conservationist, biologist and storyteller **Jeff Corwin** served as the keynote speaker, also sharing inspirational stories from his decades of field reporting. His message was rooted in conservation beginning with understanding: “Good people make poor decisions only in the absence of knowledge.” His passion for wildlife left attendees with a lasting reminder of the vital role education and empathy play in protecting the planet. Prior to these remarks, four coveted awards were presented to this year’s honors.

In Dr. Rabb’s honor, the evening’s most prestigious recognition—the **George B. Rabb Conservation Medal**—was presented to **Dr. Nan Schaffer**, a world-renowned veterinarian, scientist and founder of SOS Rhino. Dr. Schaffer’s pioneering research in rhino reproduction has advanced conservation breeding programs around the world, providing critical tools to safeguard biodiversity for generations to come. Such accomplishments were amplified with the evening’s surprise announcement that Dr. Schaffer has received a **Lifetime Achievement Award, awarded in 2025 from President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.**

The **Corwith Hamill Lifetime Achievement Conservation Award** was presented to the Emmert family, including long-time Brookfield Zoo Chicago Trustee and Treasurer **Michael P. Emmert** and his late wife **Jan Emmert**. Together, their leadership, service and philanthropy have advanced the Zoo’s mission. Mike has served on the Zoo’s board for more than 24 years, while Jan—a founding member and former president of the Zoo’s Women’s Board—helped lead one of the most successful Whirl galas in the Zoo’s history. Their son and daughter-in-law continue the family’s legacy of service to conservation.

Dr. Katherine (Katie) McHugh, deputy program director and senior scientist with the **Sarasota Dolphin Research Program (SDRP)**, received the **Rising Conservation Leader Award**. Her research on dolphin populations in Sarasota Bay has been instrumental in reducing risks to marine life from human activity. Having begun her career as an intern at SDRP, Dr. McHugh now mentors students and early-career scientists, shaping the future of marine conservation. The **Edith Rockefeller McCormick Partnership Award** was presented to the **Aurelio M. Caccamo Family Foundation**, accepted by Foundation

representative **Marty Tish**, in recognition of nearly 25 years of partnership with Brookfield Zoo Chicago. The Foundation began with the late Dr. Aurelio Caccamo, a visionary physician and passionate supporter of the Zoo who established the Caccamo Radiology Suite in 2005. This contribution established the Zoo's Animal Hospital as one of the most advanced veterinary facilities in the country.

Together, this year's honorees reflect the collaboration and dedication that drive innovation and progress. The Conservation Leadership Awards Dinner is one of many ways that community members can learn about the groundbreaking work shaping conservation worldwide while also supporting the Zoo's mission. More information is available at brookfieldzoo.org/conservationleadershipawards.
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Media Note: B-roll and photos are available for [download here](#), with credit to "© Brookfield Zoo Chicago" for media use only. Journalists interested interview opportunities should contact Zoo PR Director Julianne Olivo in advance at julianne.olivo@brookfieldzoo.org or 708-688-8351.

About Brookfield Zoo Chicago: Connect. Care. Conserve.

Since 1934, Brookfield Zoo Chicago has been a global leader in animal well-being and conservation, inspiring conservation leadership by connecting people with wildlife and nature. The Zoo is a private nonprofit organization that operates on 235 acres of land owned by the Forest Preserves of Cook County and is home to more than 3,500 animals representing over 500 species—including many of Earth's most endangered. Brookfield Zoo Chicago was the first zoo in the world to be Humane Certified™ by the American Humane Society for the care and welfare of its animals, and is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums, and ArbNet. For more information, visit www.brookfieldzoo.org or follow @BrookfieldZoo on Instagram, Facebook and Threads.