Tulsa Zoo Works Toward Environmental Sustainability

Over the past five years, the Tulsa Zoo in Tulsa, Okla., has worked to become one of the most “Green” businesses in the Tulsa area. In 2014, the Tulsa Zoo implemented a Green Practices Strategic Plan which currently guides the organization towards a fundamental value and goal of being as environmentally neutral as possible in its day-to-day operations.

The Tulsa Zoo has been very successful in achieving its goals of reducing its ecological footprint through on-site initiatives and community partnerships that foster green practices. Through the Green Practices Strategic Plan, the Zoo has grown its on-site recycling program and has tremendously increased its efforts in reducing and diverting its total solid waste through community recycling programs.

Prior to 2014, the Tulsa Zoo had only been recycling items such as plastic bottles, aluminum cans, and cardboard. Currently, the Tulsa Zoo has 17 different recycling streams of material. Items such as wooden pallets, batteries, packing materials, electronic waste, plastic bags, and many others are now diverted away from refuse containers. In fact, the Zoo recycles around 2,000 pounds of material a week. Any material that is not recycled, repurposed, or donated is then transferred to Covanta, a local Energy-from-Waste facility that converts our trash into renewable energy. Covanta is located worldwide and at the Tulsa facility they process 1,125 tons-per-day of solid waste, generating up to 298,000 pounds per hour of steam. The steam is used to power a turbine generator that produces 16.8 megawatts of clean, renewable energy that is sold to Public Service Company of Oklahoma.

In November of 2018, the Tulsa Zoo was presented with the 2018 America Recycles Day Non-Profit Business Award. The award was presented by the Metropolitan Environmental Trust (metrecycle.com), a regional organization that empowers member communities to collaborate and to promote environmental responsibility and support the highest quality environmental programs and services that promote regulatory compliance, reduce the solid waste stream, and teach sound environmental practices to the public. The award is a way to promote recycling efforts and at the same time coincide with the national holiday America Recycles Day by honoring recycling heroes within the State of Oklahoma.

In 2018, the Tulsa Zoo was also recognized by Sustainable Tulsa for their green practices and received the Henry Bellmon Award for Sustainability. Sustainable Tulsa (sustainabledotulsa.org) is an organization which provides education, tools, and resources to inform and engage businesses and individuals in three areas of sustainability: social responsibility, economic vitality, and environmental stewardship—people, profit, planet. The award was given to the Tulsa Zoo based on its successes and programs centered on green practices and sustainability within the Sustainable Tulsa’s Scorecard program. The Scorecard program not only includes an interactive tool to help assess and track the Zoo’s sustainability efforts, it also provides best business practices from experts in their field and provides many resources that help support initiatives within the Zoo’s green practices strategic plan.

The Tulsa Zoo is a leader in sustainability within the Tulsa community by participating as a ScoreCard coach for both American Airlines and the professional baseball team and affiliate of the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Tulsa Drillers. The Tulsa Zoo helps as a liaison and mentor, aiding the business as they participate in the Scorecard program with becoming a more sustainable business. The Tulsa Zoo supports its community’s commitment to be successful in green practices and ensuring a healthy planet for generations to come.