

# NEWS RELEASE



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## VIRGINIA ZOO PLANT GURU RETIRES

NORFOLK, Va. – The Virginia Zoo’s horticulturalist has accepted a position as executive director for the Iowa Arboretum and will retire from the city Wednesday after 32 years working for the Virginia Zoo.

“I’m very proud of my staff, my coworkers and our volunteers, past and present, and of what we’ve created here at the Virginia Zoo, Mark Schneider said. “We’ve transformed the Zoo into a zoological garden where people can come to enjoy both plants and animals.”

During his tenure, Schneider built several successful partnerships in the community, including the Tanner’s Creek Garden Center, which was created in concert with Eggleston Services to provide unique horticultural opportunities to people with disabilities; the Gardening Restores Our Way of life, or GROW, program, which is a partnership with Norfolk Therapeutic Recreation that uses gardening as therapy; and a relationship between the Zoo’s Horticulture Department and Tidewater Community College. The Zoo has also been active in the Virginia Horticultural Foundation, on which Schneider has served at times as board member and president.

Conservation is a core mission of the Virginia Zoo, and Schneider spearheaded important conservation projects, working with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Elizabeth River Project. The projects include restoring 500 feet of the Zoo’s Lafayette River shoreline to a functioning wetland, and launching artificial islands as “floating wetlands” to clean the water in the Zoo’s duck pond.

“Mark is an institution here. He’s made so many valuable contributions to the Zoo and the community,” said Greg Bockheim, the Zoo’s executive director. “We will all miss him greatly, but he has our gratitude and our best wishes.”

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## **ZOO PLANT GURU, 2 OF 3**

Schneider holds a Master of Public Administration degree from Old Dominion University, a Master of Arts in Education and Human Development from George Washington University and a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from the University of Delaware. The awards he has won, or accepted on behalf of the Zoo, include the Community Partnership Award for developing gardening programs for people with disabilities (2010), Stewardship Merit Award for River and Watershed Protection from the Norfolk Environmental Commission (2010), and Horticulturalist of the Year from the Hampton Roads Nursery and Landscape Association (1998). He has also volunteered as a Big Brother and Cub Scout leader, and worked with area students on a variety of educational horticulture-related projects.

## ZOO PLANT GURU, 3 OF 3



**Mark Schneider plants one of the floating islands at the Virginia Zoo March 19, 2011. One of the Zoo's conservation projects, the islands are now helping clean the water in the Zoo's duck pond (Virginia Zoo photo by Winfield Danielson).**

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*As an accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facility, the Virginia Zoo exhibits more than 400 animals on 53 beautifully landscaped acres. For more than a century, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation, and offered a fun-filled day for visitors of any age. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at 3500 Granby Street in Norfolk. Daily admission prices are \$11.00 for adults, \$10.00 for seniors (age 62 and over) and \$9.00 for children ages 2-11. Visit [www.virginiazoo.org](http://www.virginiazoo.org) or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.*