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Surprise donation helps zoo

Reno facility won't have to sell animals

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RENO -- The financially strapped Sierra Safari Zoo in Reno won't have to sell any animals after receiving the largest donation in its history, zoo officials said.

The Reno Rodeo Foundation donated \$10,000 to the zoo last week, the latest of many donations made since news of the zoo's plight surfaced.

"Overall, since those stories, we have raised about \$20,000," Jimmy Martin, the zoo's founder and co-director, told the Reno Gazette-Journal. "Our goal is about \$40,000, so we are halfway there.

"We are out of our immediate crisis because we were down to almost nothing. This donation came as a big surprise," he added.

The zoo is home to almost 200 animals, including lions, tigers, monkeys and alligators. It's also one of only two facilities in the country to display a liger, a cross between a lion and tiger.

Low attendance has put the zoo, which is open from April through October, into financial trouble, Martin said.

Admissions revenue this year dropped by 11.5 percent, to \$57,418. At the same time, the zoo's cost of insurance jumped from \$12,700 to \$16,000.

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Martin stressed that the zoo's money problems aren't over.

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"This has probably been the worst financial jam we have been in," he said. "But we can't call this a big fund-raising success yet and have everybody stop donating."

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Other key contributions include \$2,500 from Western Nevada Supply Co. and \$1,000 from Saturn of Reno. Most donations have come from individuals in the \$25 to \$50 range.

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The rodeo foundation made the donation because the zoo adds to the quality of life for many schoolchildren, said president John Solari.

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