Smithsonian Mobile Exhibit Explores the Human-Animal Bond

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From the cows that provide the milk for a bowl of cereal to the deer nibbling on a shrub in the park, from sea lions working with their trainers at the zoo to puppies chasing balls in the yard, the connections humans have with animals are vast. This special relationship is explored in a new mobile exhibit from the Smithsonian.

“Animal Connections: Our Journey Together,” a custom-built exhibition housed on an 18-wheel truck that expands into 1,000 square feet of space, will be on view on the National Mall between the Smithsonian Castle and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History Saturday, Oct. 26, through Monday, Oct. 28, before moving to a location near the U.S. Botanic Garden Tuesday, Oct. 29. The free exhibition will be open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For the safety of animals and people, visitors are asked not to bring pets.

“The affection that people everywhere have for animals sparked our enthusiasm for an exhibit about veterinary medicine that would inspire lively conversations about the human-animal bond,” said Anna R. Cohn, director of Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES).

Developed to inspire future generations of veterinary professionals, the free exhibition explores the shared responsibility for animals’ health and well-being. “Animal Connections” was created by SITES to mark the 150th anniversary of the American Veterinary Medical Association. The exhibition is made possible through the support of Zoetis, Inc., a company that discovers, develops and manufacturers veterinary vaccines and medicines.

“Of the more than 74 million American households that include pets, nearly two-thirds consider their pets family members,” said Dr. Clark Fobian, president of the AVMA. “The deep connection Americans have with animals and the pivotal role veterinarians play in our relationships with all animals are so wonderful and worthy of celebration on our 150th anniversary.”

Divided into five sections, the exhibition focuses on animals in the home, on the farm, at the zoo, in the wild and at the veterinary clinic. Visitors are offered a variety of ways to learn through informative displays, dynamic videos and interactive experiences. In the home section, visitors will learn how to select the right pet and the possible dangers to pets, such as household items like plants and holiday decorations and giving them food prepared for family members. A display in the farm section highlights the mobile clinics that large-animal veterinarians stock with a variety of tools — from dental speculums to cow magnets — to ensure they are prepared for any procedure. A virtual clinic at the center of the exhibition provides visitors the opportunity to be the veterinarian. Through touch screens, they can examine and diagnose what ails their virtual patients — a dog, a piglet and a cheetah.

“At Zoetis, we work every day to better understand and address the real-world challenges faced by those who raise and care for animals,” said Clint Lewis, executive vice president and president of U.S. business at Zoetis. “As part of our commitment to veterinarians, we are proud to join with the Smithsonian and the AVMA in supporting ‘Animal Connections’ as a means to inspire young people to pursue careers in veterinary medicine and its allied professions.”

In addition to exploring the expert care that zoo animals receive, the exhibition features enrichment objects used at the Smithsonian’s National Zoo to encourage natural behaviors in animals. For example, large plastic balls provided to tigers to put their hunting instincts to work and the zebras’ special feeders replicate grazing in the wild. Videos will showcase that even suburban areas have a great diversity of wildlife—from the squirrels trying to break into a birdfeeder to a bear lounging in a hammock.

Visitors to “Animal Connections” can continue the learning experience online at animalconnections.com. The site includes resources on animal care and careers in veterinary medicine.

About Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES)
SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, D.C., for 60 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science and history, which are shown wherever people live, work and play.

About American Veterinary Medical Association
The AVMA, established in 1863, is a not-for-profit association representing more than 84,000 veterinarians working in private
and corporate practice, government, industry, academia and uniformed services. The mission of the association is to improve animal and human health and advance the veterinary medical profession.

About Zoetis

Zoetis (zō-EH-tis) is a leading animal health company dedicated to supporting customers and businesses focused on raising and caring for livestock and companion animals. Building on a 60-year history as the animal health business of Pfizer, Zoetis discovers, develops, manufactures and markets veterinary vaccines and medicines, complemented by diagnostic products and genetic tests.

Media Contact:

Jennifer Schommer
(202) 633-3121
schommerj@si.edu

Media website:  http://newsdesk.si.edu

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